

2016

# The Mockingbird

ETSU Department of Art and Design

ETSU Department of Literature and Language

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# The Mockingbird

The Student Arts & Literary Magazine  
of East Tennessee State University





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EAST TENNESSEE STATE  
UNIVERSITY

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## The Mockingbird 2016

The cover image is a detail from *Flower* by Alisa Johnson.

*The Mockingbird* design is by Jeanette Henry,  
East Tennessee State University, Printing and Publications.

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East Tennessee State University, Department of Art & Design.

# The Mockingbird

The Student Arts & Literary Magazine  
of East Tennessee State University

Published annually  
as a joint project of the  
Department of Literature and Language  
and the Department of Art and Design



2016

Volume 43 edited by Jessica Hall



A project like *The Mockingbird* requires the support and cooperation of so many people that one hopes the production of the magazine itself serves as an expression of gratitude, but we would like to offer our thanks to Dr. Bert C. Bach, ETSU's Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, who has authorized the magazine's production fund as part of the regular budget of the Department of Literature and Language. We also thank Dr. Gordon Anderson, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, Dr. Katherine Weiss, Chair of the Department of Literature and Language, and Professor Mira Gerard, Chair of the Department of Art and Design, for their continued support and commitment to this project. We cannot overemphasize the creativity and patience of the ETSU Printing and Publications Office and, particularly, Ms. Jeanette Henry, our designer. Thank you all for sustaining this project.



# Table of Contents

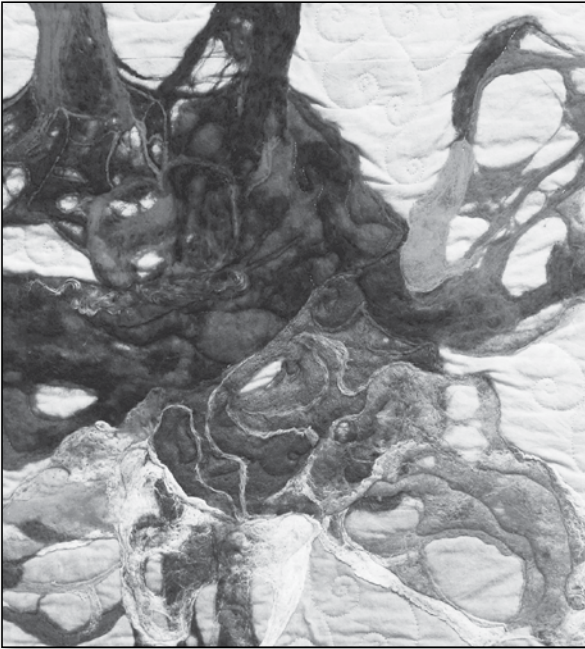
9	Editor's Note
11	Meta Moments – Katie Lea
12	Conception – Danielle Byington
13	Words, with You in Mind – Danielle Byington
14	Calamine Typewriter – Danielle Byington
15	Sparkling – Lindsey King <i>Prize for Fiction</i>
21	Contingency – Matthew Gilbert
22	<i>Alcedo Atthis</i> – Laura Traister
25	How to Become a Fossil – Janice Hornburg
26	Because they told me to write my own history – Kelsey A. Solomon <i>Prize for Poetry</i>
28	A Song for My Mooresburg Springs Mothers – Kelsey A. Solomon
29	Triggered: Reading with a Raw Heart – Rachel Maynard
32	Honeysuckle – Carmen Burroughs <i>Printmaking Award</i>
33	Heretica Malleus – Brian Baker <i>BEST OF SHOW</i>
34	I Am Something New – Kathryn Haaland <i>Faculty Award</i>
35	Grumpy Livie – Olivia Ellis <i>CORE 2D Award</i>
36	Albatross – Linda Tipton <i>1st Prize, Tennessee Craft Award</i>
37	Soda Fired Vase – Patrick Burke <i>2nd Prize, Tennessee Craft Award</i>
38	A List of Things Someone... – Hunter Hilton <i>Drawing Award</i>
39	Unwanted Changes – C. J. Wehr <i>Jewelry &amp; Metals Award</i>
40	Mother Is My Light – Amanda Musick <i>Photography Award</i>



- 41      Flow – Whitney Parkinson  
*Ceramics Award*
- 42      Flower – Alisa Johnson  
*3rd Prize, Tennessee Craft Award*
- 43      This Looks like a Job for Aquaman – Andrew Norris  
*Painting Award*
- 44      Fracture 1 & 11 – Shalam Minter  
*Small Sculpture Award*
- 45      A Functional Use of Space – Matthew J. Brown  
*Extended Media Award*
- 46      2084 – Riley Armstrong  
*Graphic Design Award*
- 47      A Shift in Perspective – Adonica Supertramp  
*Sculpture Installation Award*
- 48      Untitled (Owl) – Haley White  
*Fibers Award*
- 49      Ornament – Brooke Day  
*CORE 3D Award*
- 50      Chiaksan – Jonathan Hill
- 51      Buried in the Mountain – Jonathan Hill
- 52      Interview with Catherine Pritchard Childress –  
Kelsey A. Solomon
- 58      The Cinnamon Peeler's Wife –  
Catherine Pritchard Childress
- 59      Bathsheba's Bath – Catherine Pritchard Childress
- 60      Blossoming Indigo – Catherine Pritchard Childress
- 61      At What Cost – Beth Miller
- 73      Deserted – Elizabeth Saulsbury  
*Prize for Drama*
- 84      Four Seasons – Joshua Cole
- 85      Scraps of a Life – Nancy Jane Earnest
- 86      Juxtaposition – Gabe Cameron  
*Prize for Non-Fiction*
- 90      The Interruption – Laura Traister
- 91      Beach Seining – Laura Traister
- 92      Circumventing the Street Preacher – Laura Traister
- 93      Indian Morning – Laura Traister
- 95      Judges' Biographies

# The Mockingbird

2016





# Editor's Note

Jessica Hall

There are gaps in the stories we've all been told—about ourselves, about our region, about our heritage. I've come to think of this issue of *The Mockingbird* as doing the work of filling in some of those gaps by telling stories most of us haven't heard or read, though many of us may have experienced something very like them or what they represent. What these pieces do, in various genres, approaches, and voices, is look at the world from perspectives that are often ignored or misconstrued. This issue features an interview with poet and ETSU alumna Catherine Pritchard Childress, in which she addresses the question of whom she writes for: "I can't sit down and write with someone else in mind because I have to tell *my* truth." In an issue bookended with an instant of self-definition called "Meta Moments" and an "Indian Morning" whose speaker is still searching, I feel there are important *individual* truths being told here. In the new cosmology shaped in "Conception," in the hard certainties that are slowly and painfully arrived at in "Sparking," and in the subversive topography charted in "Because they told me to write my own history," the work that shapes this issue speaks its own truth without recourse to a story you've heard before.

So if there's one unifying narrative I hope readers take away from this issue, it would be: Don't. Resist that most human of impulses to reduce anything to a single storyline. Don't look for yourself in a master narrative. Tell your own truth. Write your own history.

The production of *The Mockingbird* is as much of a compilation as the issue itself, and without the work and support of many, many of my mentors, colleagues, and friends in the Department of Literature and Language, this issue simply would not exist. I am immensely grateful to my committee of readers, several of whom also have fine work in this issue (no one read in any category in which he or she submitted any pieces), all of whom were very patient with my (hopefully) gentle cajoling and then responded with enthusiasm and care. My thanks to Beth Miller, Chelsea Gilbert, Danielle Byington (who will return as the 2017 *Mockingbird* editor), Dusty Brice, Gabe Cameron, Heidi Marsh, Inga Sarkodie, Jen Grant, Jonathan Hill, Joe Sloan, Joshua Cole, Kelsey Kiser, Kelsey Solomon, Luke Baugher, and Selena Harmon. I offer an especial thanks to Kelsey Solomon for her excellent, thoughtful interview with Catherine Pritchard Childress, and to Catherine

for her generosity in sharing her time, knowledge, and poetry. I am also lucky enough to count the last three editors of *The Mockingbird*, Catherine Pritchard Childress, Maggie Colvett, and Jake Vines, as friends and some of my favorite people. Each one of them has been ready with encouragement, advice, and a listening ear at various and significant stages of this process, and I appreciate those kindnesses more than I can convey.

Many thanks to this year's panel of judges for their time and thoughtfulness: Jane Hicks in Poetry, William Kelley Woolfitt in Fiction, Meredith McCarroll in Non-Fiction, and Randall Wilhelm in Drama. I would also like to thank Dr. Katherine Weiss for the generous space, both literal and metaphorical, she has provided for *The Mockingbird* and creative writing in our department. And, finally, all my gratitude to *The Mockingbird* faculty advisors Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes and Dr. Jesse Graves, who answered a ridiculous number of emails with patience and grace, always opened their doors when I knocked, and managed to laugh more than once at my "joke" that we change the name of the magazine to *The Nightingale*.

*Katie Lea*

And slowly, with each repeated phrase,  
pieces of me  
settle back into place. And I can breathe.



# Conception

*Danielle Byington*

---

A name becomes necessary.  
Gum stringing from a stepping shoe,  
A kite blindly traveling on its leash—  
The bud of consciousness transcends mitosis,  
Adhering to its nursery of conception,  
Its vertebrae no longer required to  
Climb out of the sea.  
It poses in its orb,  
The future gently parting the stewing-shrimp mass  
Into attractive pieces, helpful limbs with joints,  
Digits above and below for useful things like  
Arithmetic and buttons.  
Later comes the face,  
Looking like someone when there's  
Nothing else to talk about.  
The eyes dream about  
The shadows and echoes outside  
That remain perplexing in  
The crib, the twin bed,  
The king-sized mattress with designer sheets,  
The sides slowly erecting,  
Hinging the coffin's lid,  
Tucking in everything,  
Leaving da Vinci behind.



# Words, with You in Mind

Danielle Byington

1

Ethan Frome and Mattie Silver  
Crashed their sled into a tree,  
Her red scarf  
Whipping his face with  
Finger-laced language 'til the end,  
The yarn yearning to  
Tie them together forever.

2

A walnut tree drops its seeds,  
Grains of sand in autumn's hourglass  
Thudding on the ground like trotting hooves.  
We are the carriage in tow,  
No coachman guiding the reins,  
And there is only the way we  
Want to face each other,  
Wordless,  
Our knees knowing that we are here,  
Carried in a cloud of spokes  
Winding faster.  
We are tied to the train tracks,  
You by me,  
All of it going by us,  
A minute pleasantly ravished by every second;  
A wind blares by our sides  
Like "Westminster Chimes" until we  
Shatter like fine china—  
Private in public,  
I look at your face,  
Words in mind.



# Calamine Typewriter

Danielle Byington

Childhood summers  
Devoured my hands with poison ivy,  
Handicapping my phalanges,  
My fantasies, my fate,  
With allergic blisters that  
Screamed about nature and her untidy spores.

A jagged, botanical trinity  
Bound me to its worship,  
The height of its ritual continuously  
Summoning more calamine,  
Caking my small hands with peachy clay.  
I used them anyways.

Mother's typewriter needed my thoughts,  
No matter how irritated my skin,  
And I drafted a number of great American novels  
Elusive of language, or any words at all,  
An armada of letters and spaces  
Detailing my comfort of wasted inky ribbon.

The ticking of the keys lullabied the welts,  
The letters left frosted by calamine,  
Histamines restraining what I meant to say.



## Sparkling

Lindsey King

I remember watching the house burn down. I thought it'd be like peeling an orange. First the siding, then the studs, the sheetrock, the wallpaper, the family portraits on the walls, in and in and in until all the fire gathered in the middle of the house and, with nothing left to eat, fled with a flickering goodbye into the wind. But it was wild. It moved sporadically, it grew and shrank, eating as fast as it could and roaring the whole way through. The firemen came in their screaming trucks, and the two parties, fire and firefighters, fought over the house and over who could make the most noise.

At school, Craig Gunnerson always asked me about it. It didn't matter where we were or how quiet the third-grade teacher Mrs. Peters asked us to be. As I walked past his desk to turn in a spelling test, he grabbed my sleeve and, eyes as wild as the first time he'd heard the news, he whispered just low enough that Mrs. Peters wouldn't hear, "How hot was it?" The question was always different. How many fire trucks showed up? Four. Was it really high? Higher than the moon. Did anyone die? No one died, but apparently there had been a cat living under our porch. Who started it? A criminal, but he's in jail now. Every detail was necessary to complete his mental picture, and I always answered. "Hotter than the French fries in the cafeteria," I whispered back. He let my sleeve go and sat back in his chair, staring at the ceiling. "I thought so."

The brevity and hushed whispers were not just necessary because Mrs. Peters had requested silence. Craig knew that if she heard him asking me probing questions, she'd send him to the principal's office. Our parents had kept us out of school the day after the fire. Mom took us to Memaw and Pappy's where no one talked about the fire all day, at least not while my sister and I were in the room. When we went back to school, no one there talked about it, either. I wondered why until lunch time, when Cindy Wilkes told me that all of the teachers had given a special lesson on manners and what's not appropriate to talk

about. For the most part, the lesson stuck. Every so often, I'd catch the word "fire" or "burned" in a hushed conversation at the bathroom sink or walking through the hallway or the lunch room. The word would always come out of the mouth of someone I hadn't spoken to, some kid who I'd seen around the school but didn't know the name of. In a town of our size, a house fire offered big excitement, and it was as if everyone knew that our house had been reduced to a pile of ashes before it'd even caught fire. Craig's straightforward curiosity was like a breath of fresh air in a cow field in the middle of summer: a welcome relief, but you still wish you were somewhere else.

We lived with Memaw and Pappy for the rest of that school year and all through the summer. The first night in their house was the longest night of my young life. My older sister and I had shared the bed in the spare room. She'd complained all day about having to live with our grandparents, skipping school for the day, eating vanilla instead of chocolate ice cream at lunch. When bedtime came, she seemed to fall into an instant deep sleep, while I kept waking up to the sound of a shrieking alarm ringing in my ears, the smell of burning wood and melting plastic like acid in my nose. I'd reach across the mattress, fumbling over my sister's side, searching for her hand. Then I'd leave that miserable place between being asleep and being awake and see the room in the blue-toned moonlight: the wallpaper that curled a little at one corner was not burnt; the white six-panel door that stood slightly ajar had no smoke billowing through the crack. I'd withdraw my hand from my sister's still-sleeping form and turn to face the other side. Instinctively, my arm would seek out Chops, my pink plush pig, but it wouldn't find him. I'd had to leave him behind, asleep on my bed, to be roasted, reduced from a soft comfort to a handful of ash in the mountain of ruin. With my back to my sister, I'd snuffle and snort as my tears dampened my pillow, trying not to wake her up, though I sensed she wasn't sleeping, until my mind settled again and I drifted back to sleep on the wave of my anxiety.

My sister never talked about the fire. I remember Mom probing her one night before bedtime. I sat with my knees pulled to my chest just outside of the kitchen as they talked. Mom asked her if she was scared or if she needed someone to talk to, but she didn't say anything. I heard the microwave start, stop. Mom set a glass on the table and something smaller I couldn't place as I heard it bounce a little on the table. I imagined it was hot chocolate and some of those dehydrated mini marshmallows. I wondered why Mom didn't go ahead and put the marshmallows in the cup. I considered getting up and leaving then, since the conversation didn't seem to be going anywhere. I *should* have gotten up, but compelled by my inescapable eight-year-old curiosity, I continued eavesdropping. A lot of the words were foreign to me, which, at the time, served to prove that even the best student in Mrs. Peters's class could still be confused by words.

Now I know them to be the names of doctors, medications, techniques to correct a chemical imbalance. “Pharmacotherapy” would be the word I whispered under my breath, feeling the way it played on my tongue, tasting its mystery.

I was always sure to remember the lesson I never heard at school, the one Cindy Wilkes told me about, that there are certain things people don’t talk about, certain topics are rude. I didn’t want to be Craig Gunnerson. Though I didn’t understand the words, overhearing the conversation cast a strange atmosphere around my sister. She became a little unpredictable, a little fragile, a little distant. Afraid that I might accidentally mouth my new word around her with untold consequences, I was afraid to talk to her. I used to sit across the aisle from her on the school bus. I would lay down on the seat with the bottoms of my shoes pressed against the small rectangular plexiglass window, my head hanging over the edge of the seat into the aisle. Mom always fussed that people were going to step on my hair, but I just sat up before they walked by. I could look at her across the aisle and talk and point out when she had a booger in her nose. Occasionally, one or two of the other kids would join us, but most of them were older and I didn’t know them well. It felt strange to be jovial when Mom had so tenderly laid out those polysyllabic words on my grandparents’ kitchen table, when I couldn’t sleep without dreaming up fire alarms that my sister never heard. So I sat in my seat on the bus, close to the window. One of the older kids took the seat beside me, we didn’t talk, and when I told Mom she assumed that I hadn’t vacated the aisle fast enough one day and decided to take her advice for the sake of my hair.

Living with our parents and grandparents was much different than living with just Mom and Dad. Pappy made it his job to fill our weekends. We fished in the old Hicks’ pond, explored the deer trails in the Beamer Holler a half-mile from their house, caught fireflies in a jar and released them in a single luminous sprinkle that rose into the clouded night sky. Memaw specialized in weekdays. She always felt like she had to feed my sister and me when we got off the bus after school. Little sandwiches like they always had at baby showers or sliced Winesap apples from the orchard behind their old farmhouse or cornbread right out of the oven on cold, rainy days. On special days, she would let us help her cook, but only dessert. Even though my sister was older, she always gave her the “easy” tasks: setting the oven temperature, turning it on, and mixing the batter. She relegated the “harder” jobs to me, stuff like measuring the ingredients in her big measuring cup and portioning the cookies with a cereal spoon. I could make a dozen chocolate chip cookies with my eyes closed before I entered the fourth grade, and the word “pharmacotherapy” was slowly buried by my grandparents’ goodness.

At the end of that summer, Mom and Dad bought another house, and we moved to the other side of the county. My sister and I changed schools. She was pretty upset, but I was glad. Moving schools meant that I didn't have to answer Craig Gunnerson's questions about the fire anymore. But also, there's something special about being the new kid in a small school. All the other students are curious and excited to meet someone new. I'd seen it happen at my old school, and I started preparing for my glory days as soon as Mom and Dad told us we were moving. I hung out with whomever I wanted at recess, making sure I didn't accidentally make friends with any Craigs. Other kids invited me to sit with them at lunch and in class. Teachers were sure to call on me when I raised my hand. I basked in the attention.

Just like in our old house, my sister and I shared a bedroom. The heads of our beds met in a corner so we could talk at night without Mom and Dad hearing us and telling us to go to sleep. Excited by the newness of everything, I would stare into the darkness of our room and tell her about who I had eaten lunch with or what question I had answered right in math class, but she wouldn't say much. When I asked her questions, she would tell me that she'd been assigned a lot of homework or that she hadn't liked what the cafeteria served that day. She talked about the way things had been before the fire a lot, comparing our old house to the new one, our old school to the new one. Everything about her new life always came up short. I remember thinking that life suddenly got a lot more worrisome in seventh grade and being grateful that I was years away from all of that responsibility.

I remember the night I got tired of hearing her comparisons. I wanted her to talk about the moment the change happened, the day our house burned down. Unable to articulate exactly what I was feeling, I went more general, "I wish that stupid criminal had never burned it down. I wish he'd never gotten the idea in his head at all. I wish whoever burned it down spends their entire life in jail eating rotten ham sandwiches!" I paused. She didn't say anything, and the silence in the dark room made me even more angry. "And you don't ever talk about that! That's what's wrong, but you never talk about it!"

She didn't say anything for a long time. I was lying on my belly with my forearms on my pillow to prop my head up. Her face was two feet from mine. In the dark with no moonlight streaming through the window, I couldn't see her, but I heard a muffled sob. I felt bad for pushing her, but in that moment I was too upset to say sorry. With a huff, I laid my head down and tried to sleep, thinking about how annoying she was for avoiding the topic.

As I teetered on the edge of sleep, I heard her say, "I'm sorry, okay? I'm sorry. I

couldn't help myself." Satisfied that she'd apologized for being a bad conversation partner, I went to sleep with a smile. So young, unable to grasp what she'd really meant.

In March, the PTA hosted a Spring Fling dance. They gave us flyers at school, and I ran from the bus, up our long driveway, and into the house to show Mom. My sister came through the door a few minutes later, and Mom asked her if she wanted to go. "Sure, whatever," she replied.

At our old school, the dances were divided by grade levels, so my sister and I had never really been to the same dance, but at this school we would be together. "We can dance, you and me!" I shouted. She still didn't seem excited, but I was enthusiastic enough for both of us.

The day of the dance, I put on my nicest dress and got Mom to do my hair. My sister walked down the hallway as I was trying to pick the best shoes to match my glittery headband. She was wearing jeans and a black t-shirt.

"Aren't you going to wear a dress?" I asked.

"I'm not going," she said.

"Why not? It's gonna be fun," I said. "Our first dance together. We can make sure Julie doesn't get any of the blue M&M's from the candy bowl."

"I don't want to go."

I grabbed her arm, hugging it to my chest. "C'mon, please? It'll be fun, I swear." She struggled, but I held on tighter. I stared up at her face, trying to force her to look at my pleading eyes. But the power of my gaze wasn't enough to force her to lock eyes with me, so I licked her arm, from elbow to bicep.

"Eugh! Get off, you freak!"

She shook even harder, and I squealed, shouting, "No!" Then Mom heard us and pulled me off.

"If she doesn't want to go, she doesn't have to," she said. "Now, can you both act like young ladies, please?"

The evening I had imagined was ruined. Following Mom's advice, I went to the dance and tried to make the best of it, although all of my pent up mischief was spent so Julie got to eat blue M&M's to her heart's content.

That evening, as Mom and I got out of the car at the house, flickering shapes moved along the front porch, casting the flowerbed into swirling light and shadows. Mom got out of the car and stared at the blazing house. Dad came

running to her from the neighbor's yard. In the distance, the familiar sound of a fire truck. I got out of the car, staring at my Mom and Dad as our home burned.

This one wasn't as big; only one of the fire trucks worked to put it out. I heard Dad say, "Thank God it was just the kitchen." Maybe it was because I was still mad at her, but I didn't think to ask about my sister until the fire had been extinguished. I turned around to ask Mom but found my sister before I could open my mouth. She sat on the rope swing Dad had built when we moved in. My eyes were still blurry from watching the dancing fire, but I could have sworn that she was shaking, her hands closed tight on the rope of the swing with her head hung low. She repeated something over and over that I struggled to understand in the too-quiet night. I hesitated to take a step toward her; she was locked in her repetition. Her hands clung to the swing's ropes, turning her knuckles white. She hung her head to her chest and shook it from side to side in time with her words. For a moment, I watched her from where I stood beside Mom, afraid that I might get sucked into her world if I moved any closer.

Though the word had been banished from my mind for months, I found myself mouthing it to myself once more: *pharmacotherapy*, as if I were the counter-melody in her song. But it was gone in an instant, and I turned to Mom and asked, "Is she going to go to jail?"



# Contingency

*Matthew Gilbert*

---

Mother swathed me in thrift-store jackets,  
Exhausted, dying cottons and denim,  
Seams re-seamed and pockets patched up,  
Arm's length to my forearm or fingertips,  
Shoulders tent-like or too tight,  
a shell that wasn't meant to fit.

She spent her hours,  
calling First Baptist and filling out  
applications for the Angel Tree program;  
We picked out shirts and jeans,  
socks and underwear,  
a blue backpack and a pair of shoes.

My mother locked herself in her bedroom  
when the clothes didn't fit just right,  
she'd take seventy-five cents and buy a patch,  
ironing a small warrior onto my sleeve.  
That first day of school, she held me tight,

coarse fingers rubbed over my cheek,  
and she kissed me. When the bus drove up,  
she armed me with coloring markers  
and filler paper, crayons and notebooks,  
a pencil and an eraser  
to battle with on my journey forward.





## *Alcedo Atthis*

Laura Traister

And look! He's  
—gone again.  
Spark, sapphire, refracted  
From beyond water  
Shivering the spine of the river.

-Ted Hughes

The pink-walled entrance of Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum is guarded by a statue of Prince Albert himself. The husband of Britain's Queen Victoria, Albert loved science and the arts, and so the museum was built in his memory after his death in 1861. Beyond old Al, a series of winding passages leads to a room filled with animals—specimens, rather. Unmistakably dead. If it crawled, snapped, hooted, or flew, chances are it is here. A stuffed boar bristles behind the glass, its sharp tusks curved into a wicked smile. Around the corner, a solid polar bear stands on all fours, stuck staring at its reflection in a glass cage. Several wall-mounted deer and antelope heads gaze down at the bulkier animals, a smug smile playing across their stiffened snouts. For once, they are out of the predator's reach.

Across the room, one display case contains a menagerie of man-made objects. My eye rests on a delicate hairpin perching atop a thin stand. It is the shape of a capital letter "D" lying on its straight side, but more stretched out, like an old hunting bow. A patient hand has long since coaxed the silver pieces into enchanting shapes. Wavy flourishes dance along the outline. In the centre, a large flower unfolds, its petals hovering above the pin's frame.

On either side of the flower, I think I see two leaves etched with ridges, but when my eyes trace where the stems should stick out, I find they are attached to another mysterious shape. All at once, I pick out the eye and beak of a bird. Two of the creatures stand poised in op-

posite directions, their backs to the flower in the centre, their noodly heads and necks craning to see beyond their cage. Their plumage, like the rest of the pin's details, is startlingly blue.

At first I guess the metal is inlaid with stone, but I can't place the striking color of the object. Not sapphire. Not exactly aquamarine, but almost. I peer closer. Something not so solid as stone. I glance at the identification cards and find the corresponding number. 20. *Hairpin with kingfisher feathers. 19<sup>th</sup> century. China.* The pin's silent neighbors are other hairpieces of various sizes. One, a South American comb made of tortoiseshell, looms high above its companion. Its teeth hang down like insect legs, ready to scuttle away and settle in some unsuspecting woman's hair. Behind it, a rumpled fan seems to protest being forever unfolded. On a pair of cold snakeskin boots, diamond patterns narrow like eyes casting venomous glares. They are all beautiful, but it seems strange, rude, to look at these pieces divorced from the living.

I'm sure I have seen a picture of a kingfisher before, but nothing specific comes to mind, so I do what any Millennial would do and grab my iPhone. I Google the creature, scrolling through the crisp images that surface. There are about ninety different types, but the kind I am looking for is the common kingfisher, scientific name *Alcedo atthis*, habitat throughout Eurasia. It is much smaller than I expected and wields a tiny sword as a beak. Sometimes also called a halcyon, it shimmers in a kaleidoscope of color. In Greek mythology, Halcyon was a goddess who, along with her mortal husband Ceyx, was transformed into a seabird after Ceyx died in a tempest. The bird's breast and belly are a muted sunset, while the nape of its head, back, and tail are a solid blue, royal. The captivating color of the feathers used for the ornaments—the unreal azure of tropical oceans you see on postcards or travel brochures—flickers in specks across its crown and spreads in patches down its backbone.

To make a pin, a craftsperson would fill a silver framework with strings of feathers individually dipped in glue before placement. The thin glue, called *funori*, was a mix of animal hide glue, or seaweed extract paired with isinglass, a substance made from the swim bladders of fish. The Chinese name for the process, *tian-ts'ui*, translates literally to 'dotting with kingfishers.' Kingfisher hair pieces were traditionally worn by the women in China's Imperial household and court. Later, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, feathered ornaments of any kind became a fashion craze in parts of Europe and North America, and birds were harvested from near and far to meet the demand.

The adornments were a sign of wealth and status for their owners, but they were mostly prized as a way to accentuate beauty. Gracing the back of a fixed hair style, the pin was a crown of sorts for women fortunate enough to parade the

emblem. I think it must have looked best nestled in a twist of red-orange hair that reflected the kingfisher's own curious blend of hues. But still, how strange to adorn ourselves with the deadened parts of another living thing.

Humans have yearned to fly for as long as we have existed. We have attempted to get close to the water, to glean its shimmering inhabitants and feed our families. We do both now, flying and fishing, but only through the clunky apparatus of a Boeing 757 or a fiberglass fishing rod. The kingfisher just can. It darts like an arrow from that old hunting bow, parting its beak right before piercing the river's spine, and before the splash-spray can land, it catapults back to the surface, victorious.

Perhaps our admiration is an admission of our weaknesses compared to other creatures in some ways. The cerulean feathers I cannot turn away from are not part of the human body's palette. The bluest pair of eyes, the boldest orange tresses may come close, but nature seems to have bestowed some gifts—the ability to wind-glide, to conquer a river, to be born and just *know*—on only the most regal of creatures.



# How to Become a Fossil

*From an article in National Geographic by Brian Switek*

*Janice Hornburg*

Tiptoe through tide pools. Press washtub-wide  
digits deep into ripples, leave lake-bed claw marks  
as evidence of your passage.

Bury your bones in sediment.  
Avoid river rapids and the jaws of scavengers  
trying to scatter your skeleton.

Don't rot. Sink into oxygen-poor muck  
like the bird-dinosaur, Archaeopteryx—  
teeth and feathers pristine after millions of years.

Live near a volcano. Leave a pyroclastic snapshot  
of your final moment like Nebraskan rhinos  
smothered in ash, or the citizens of Pompeii.

Rest your remains in amber.  
Pin your wings in pine tree's sticky resin,  
belly-full of dinosaur DNA.

Entomb your tusks in permafrost.  
Melt after millennia, fresh enough to clone,  
last meal of buttercups leafy in your stomach.

Petrify your bones—avoid erosion.  
Sleep through continental collision,  
the rise and fall of mountains.

Pray for the preservation of a curious species  
who may someday quarry your resting place,  
find joy in your remains.



## Because they told me to write my own history

Kelsey A. Solomon

or set the record straight, fine tune the details  
to mean something other than drunken fathers

and tired mothers, cure the landscape's curse  
of my name and green eyes and quiet funerals.  
I won't write you a clockwork history. I form my lips

for concepts, myths, how I sing like my father but  
I sing for my mother's empty side of the bed.

Instead, I will present to you a picture of us  
during a family baseball game, you at the  
pitching mound, my brother at bat,

Bailey holding out her wet tongue for  
the ball flying toward my catcher's mitt.

I will teach you how to cook green bean casserole  
and scare the doodle bugs, then lead you to the creek  
where I got pregnant and my uncle hid the sang.

I will lend you my sister's favorite shade of lipstick,  
pick you daisies from Mamaw's farm and advise

you how not to read the Bible. And I won't tell  
you that God created us in his image, that you ever  
have to wear my sister's lipstick, that there's always

sang left for us if we know where to find it, that your  
daddy said he loved me by the water, that your cooking,

although tasty, must be your most selfless act, that girls  
can't play sports, that my mother loved me for exactly  
who I am and who I loved, that daddy was a happy drunk.

And I'll never tell you that your crush on your best girlfriend  
is wrong, that your accent makes you ignorant, that you should.



# A Song for My Mooresburg Springs Mothers

Kelsey A. Solomon

Yarrow bows to the beat of her feet, an invitation to  
tread on royal carpet, sewn with Pennsylvania sledge.  
Morning glories know it's past their bedtime, but  
the smell of her breath confuses them, and they believe in it—  
from side to side, they sway. Black-eyed Susans grow taller in  
need of her hands, the whistle in her hair, choosing only her to  
pick them, flaunting their petals despite the rain—  
from side to side, they sway. He's waiting for her under the  
cedar of broken music notes—to sing, to save her. Beer-laced  
rhythms tell her a story there, knitted with bias and stammers  
while the sips fall down his lips—from side to side, he sways.  
She buries the Susans in his shirt pocket, and they wilt.  
The little girl closes her eyes as his song fades and hangs in  
the branches. She dies for pretty things in her head, stands  
to meet the muddy walk, and forgets how to dance.



# Triggered: Reading with a Raw Heart

Rachel Maynard

It started off with a simple observation, as the class was discussing the unfortunate Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. "He really reminds me of a stroke victim," one of my classmates stated. My stomach tightened as she ran through a list of characteristics: change in appearance, odd diet, severely altered speech, and unusual behavior. Until this point, I had been an eager participant in the discussion, but my voice vanished as Gregor Samsa's experiences were colored by my own painful memories. My father's dramatic weight loss and sudden aging, pureed food, hours of speech therapy where he struggled to vocalize at all, and disturbing lack of emotional control. As my classmates condemned Samsa's family for their seemingly unsympathetic behavior toward Gregor, I felt condemned as well. Only one person in that class knew that my father had suffered a life-altering stroke barely a year earlier. No one knew the emotions I was choking down as they stirred up some of my waking nightmares.

I left class that day feeling sick and depressed, as well as confused. No book had ever caused me to react to my own life with pain. Most of the time, I would cry with characters over their own struggles (which I did the first time I read *The Metamorphosis*), but fiction had never led me to cry over a hurt so close to my own, as I did later that day when I went home. I felt unexpected sympathy for the Samsa family, blindsided by their sole provider's transformation into someone they did not understand, their feelings of compassion tinged with fear of the unknown—of their loved one's new, unpredictable nature. Similar feelings had haunted me for months by that time, but I rarely—if ever—talked about them. So I did what I had been doing for a year: waited until I was alone, cried, and went on without dealing with my situation.

What I didn't realize at the time was that I had been "triggered." I had come into contact with something that caused a physiological response to the trauma I was struggling to repress. At the time this



happened, I believed that only victims of sexual violence ever experienced severe reactions to reminders of their trauma. Obviously, this was not the case, but as I was refusing to think about my sick feelings for fear that they would stir up the depression and emotional hypersensitivity I had been struggling with, I buried my response to *The Metamorphosis* until I had a similar response to another reading. This time, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* brought to light all of the thoughts I had been trying to ignore about my family's struggle with various addictions, many of which had been exposed only a few months before my class—the same time when my father was recovering from his stroke.

Once again, the class discussion went on without me, because I was too afraid of “oversharing” to participate. But this time, things were different. Several of my classmates talked about their own experiences dealing with addicted family members. As they shared their struggles, I saw a correlation with my own. I still wasn't ready to speak about my problems, and I still cried when I got home, but I was starting to come to an understanding.

“We read to know we are not alone” is a quote frequently misattributed to C. S. Lewis, but regardless of its author, it holds true. In fiction, we often discover others who have suffered in the same way we have. But there is an even more meaningful way that reading can show us “we are not alone”: by connecting us with other readers who have shared our experiences, especially the painful ones. I was just beginning to realize this as my class moved on to one of our final texts, which proved to be the most triggering for me: Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*.

This time, I didn't let my emotions overwhelm and isolate me. When I felt my stomach twisting in knots and my throat closing, I spoke. When the character Rachel shared her long-repressed story of what I now know is called “caretaker's guilt,” I spoke up in her defense. I had been there. I had stayed by my father's side for days on end while he recovered from his stroke, and sometimes I hated it, which made me hate myself. It was the first time I had talked through any of that, and it surprised me when my classmates were willing to listen. I also believe we came to a better understanding of Stephen King's novel as a result of discussing real-life examples of the same psychological struggles presented in the novel.

The class also supported me when I spoke out in Rachel's defense—again—as she became more emotionally unstable as the book progressed. I pointed out that she was caring for two hysterical children, was losing sleep, was dealing with her own long-suppressed guilt over her sister's death, and was receiving very little support for her husband. My argument changed several people's per-

spectives on that character. And again, I sympathized deeply with her, because I had also been in a house where everyone was hysterical, sleep deprived, and emotionally hypersensitive. My personal experiences were able to help others gain a better understanding of the text we were reading. Additionally, as we discussed King's novel and I wove stories from my own life into discussion, others began to do so as well, helping us to confront some of our most painful memories in a way that sapped those memories of their strength.

When I hear about trigger warnings, I think about my experience in my undergraduate "Villains and Monsters" class. I think about the times I felt sick and went home and cried and considered dropping the class, but I still went back. And I remember the outcome. That class taught me things I never knew about the power of literature to create community and to foster healing and growth. Maybe I was the only one affected, but the things I learned in that class will one day help me teach my own classes. While trigger warnings may be advisable for some students, I'm thankful that I struggled on without them, because in the end, being triggered by literature was what helped my raw heart start to heal.



# Honeysuckle

*Sponsored by Wyatt Moody Memorial Fund*

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*Carmen Burroughs*

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❧ *BEST OF SHOW* ❧

# Heretica Malleus

*Sponsored by The Honors College*

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*Brian Baker*

---

# I Am Something New

*Sponsored by Faculty of Art & Design*

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*Kathryn Haaland*

---

# Grumpy Livie

*Sponsored by Mark Russell Fund / Nelson*

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*Olivia Ellis*

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🏆 1<sup>st</sup> Prize, Tennessee Craft Award 🏆

# Albatross

Sponsored by Tennessee Craft



Linda Tipton

🏆 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize, Tennessee Craft Award 🏆

## Soda Fired Vase

Sponsored by Tennessee Craft



Patrick Burke



# A List of Things Someone...

Sponsored by Jerry's Artarama of Knoxville



*Hunter Hilton*

# Unwanted Changes

*Sponsored by Jerry's Artarama of Knoxville*

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*C. J. Wehr*

---

# Mother Is My Light



*Amanda Musick*

---

# Flow

Sponsored by Highwater Clays



Whitney Parkinson



3rd Prize, Tennessee Craft Award

# Flower

*Sponsored by Tennessee Craft*

---



*Alisa Johnson*

---

# This Looks like a Job for Aquaman

*Sponsored by Nelson Fine Art Center*

---



*Andrew Norris*

---

# Fracture I & II

*Sponsored by Jerry's Artarama of Knoxville*

---



*Shalam Minter*

---

# A Functional Use of Space

*Sponsored by Nelson Fine Art Center*

---



*Matthew J. Brown*

---



2084

Sponsored by Fletcher H. Dyer Memorial Fund



Riley Armstrong

# A Shift in Perspective

*Sponsored by Catherine Murray Sculpture Fund*

---



*Adonica Supertramp*

---

# Untitled (Owl)

*Sponsored by Soleus Massage*

---



*Haley White*

---

# Ornament

*Sponsored by Mark Russell Fund / Jerry's*

---



*Brooke Day*

---

# Chia~~k~~son

*Jonathan Hill*

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On a mountain path, a pitch  
of ice & no

going back. Pine  
roots twine

grafts of sunlight  
drifting

in the stream.  
When an old monk

bows to you, the day  
deepens.

At the peak  
the wind is flint—

it sheers the brindled ridge  
raw. Here

there is no shelter  
& what you left behind

at the campsite  
will still be there

when you return in the dark.



# Buried in the Mountain

Jonathan Hill

In ash trees whittled  
bone bare  
by lathes of wind,

light-gashes  
kilter through with nothing  
to bite. Magpies

scavenge the fields  
for lost heads  
of barley as the ridge-spine  
cracks like a monk

bowing before an empty  
wooden bowl.

When the path to the sacred  
is gouged  
beyond recognition,

you must lay yourself  
face down

into the ancient scars.



# Interview with Catherine Pritchard Childress

Kelsey A. Solomon

Catherine Pritchard Childress lives in the Appalachian Mountains of East Tennessee, where she teaches writing and literature at East Tennessee State University and Northeast State Community College. She received her Masters in English from ETSU, where she served as editor of the fortieth issue of *The Mockingbird*. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *North American Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Connecticut Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *The Cape Rock*, *Town Creek Poetry*, *drafthorse*, *Stoneboat*, *Kaimana*, and *Kudzu Literary Magazine*, among other journals, and has been anthologized in *Southern Poetry Anthology Volume VI: Tennessee* and *Volume VII: North Carolina*. Her chapbook, *Other*, was published in 2015 by Finishing Line Press.

**Kelsey A. Solomon:** Catherine, I first need to thank you for agreeing to this interview. I am especially grateful to be asked to talk about your first published work, *Other*. Your poetry had an empowering impact on me, especially with how you effectively universalize the marginalized experiences of Appalachian and biblical women with raw but complicated honesty, and you've particularly made me feel that my experience as a woman and an Appalachian has been mastered in verse.

**Catherine Pritchard Childress:** Thank you so much for your generosity. You can't know how much it means to poets—as our work is generally under-read and undervalued—to know that the poems have significance once it leaves our care.

**KAS:** Absolutely. For our first question, I want to know what you were reading during the composition of *Other*, because I find it very interesting how borrowed themes surface in newly published poetry. Which literary works were most influential to your work in *Other*?

**CPC:** I love that question because you didn't say, "Which poems or poets?" We tend to assume too often that only other poets influence

poetry. After reading Sebastian Faulks' *Birdsong*, I started thinking about male and female transgressive sexuality, and about how it is not okay, particularly for women, to be sexual and to own their bodies and sexual experiences. While writing *Other*, I was constantly thinking about the things women are not allowed to own. Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* informed my interest in the dichotomy between woman as whore and woman as angel. Hardy's novel was also inspiring because I believe that Hardy meant to go to bat for Tess, and she was very much in my mind during the two years of writing the poems in *Other*.

I revisited Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* as well as his book of poetry called *Secular Love*. Ondaatje's poetry is not about women per se, but he writes with a sensual kind of language that I admire. A poem in *Other* called "The Cinnamon Peeler's Wife" is a response to one of his poems called "The Cinnamon Peeler."

Also, Charlotte Pence's first chapbook, called *Weaves a Clear Night*, was one of my faithful companions. I found it most interesting because, as the blurb on that book says, it is an Appalachian retelling of the myth of Penelope and Odysseus. I still return to that chapbook at least once a month, but while writing *Other*, I read it weekly.

**KAS:** In my reading experience many Appalachian poets emphasize the importance of landscape and our topophobic or topophilic relationships to the natural world. In your work, however, you focus on the psychological complexities of our interpersonal relationships with people. Is your poetry a deliberate separation from the Appalachian tradition?

**CPC:** It was not deliberate in as much as I sat down to write and said, "I don't want to write Appalachia." It is not my goal to be Appalachian because I have general trouble with labels. I don't like being called a woman poet, female poet, or a regional poet because such labels dilute the richness of artists' work. Why can't we just be poets?

I think your observation about the emphases of Appalachian poetry is a generational one. The generation immediately preceding mine included those who were so bound to and dependent upon land and place for their livelihood and survival. However, my generation of Appalachians was raised with a connection to but not a dependence upon the land. That's the difference. That's in part where the shift happens. James Still and the ones we consider canonical Appalachian poets lived in a very different Appalachia than we do today. We define Appalachia according to our own experiences of it. However, I take issue with the perpetuation of the hillbilly stereotype, and I still think that some of



my contemporaries do the region a disservice by reusing it. Appalachia now is more inclusive and representative than anything that came before us, and I'm proud to be identified with that Appalachia.

**KAS:** Who is your target audience in *Other*?

**CPC:** I don't have one. I write for the page, the piece of paper. I write for myself. I learned early on that writing to any audience, real or imagined, is inhibiting to me because I spent too much time thinking, "Who is going to read this and get mad about it?" As a young poet, you never imagine that there's going to be an audience. You hope that there will be, but you can't let yourself believe that there's going to be. When I started thinking about the possibility of an audience, I was terrified. It was imperative that I put those thoughts aside early on.

**KAS:** Was there a book of poetry that helped you relieve your anxiety of audience?

**CPC:** Linda Parsons Marion's *Mother Land* deals with very personal subject matter, and she does it with such grace and bravery. I imagine how painful it was to write that collection. During the time when I read Marion's poetry, it occurred to me how beautifully she told her own truth. "Instead of You," a poem that haunted me for a long time, was particularly difficult to write. I kept resisting it, but lines kept coming to me. I decided then that her way is the only way to do this gig right. I can't sit down and write with someone else in mind because I have to tell *my* truth. After I determined this, the poem "Instead of You" came to me quite literally on a napkin while I was sitting at a function in the Honors College.

**KAS:** I personally feel that writing effective but accessible poetry is the most difficult task for a poet, and I believe you write accessible poetry very well. Your work is "deceptively simple" in essence. Who most influenced your poetic style?

**CPC:** The first person that comes to mind is Don Johnson. What I admire about his work so much and what he taught me has resulted in what you call "deceptively simple." Don taught me how to economize language, to pay close attention to diction, and to question meticulously what each word means. He insisted that I evaluate every word and get the most possible worth from it. You label my poetry in a much nicer way, but I just say that I write "short, fat poems." For me, it's all about the economy. If you can say what you want to say in one word instead of five, then do it. I spend a lot of time doing research, but in the prewriting stage, I spend a lot of time with words and categorizing words in order to get the most out of an idea.

**KAS:** What is your opinion about the importance of accessible poetry in relation to a new generation of readers in the twenty-first century?

**CPC:** I have mixed feelings. As a reader of poetry first, I think poems are worth the effort. I think that we get from them what he put into them. As a poet, how much can I expect from the reader? I think about that with certain words, allusions, or references I make. Should I include only things that I know the average readers are going to understand at first glance, or is it fair to expect them to do the work? As both a writer and reader of poetry, I think it is okay to expect readers to do research as a part of their reading experience. That's the reward—to uncover the truth of that poem. Realistically speaking, modern readers, students in particular, are not going to invest the time to struggle through something difficult, and as a poet and an academic, I think they should.

**KAS:** You've started a mini-revolution of biblical persona poems in our creative writing classes here on campus. What led you to recreate the perspectives of Lot's wife, Bathsheba, and Mary Magdalene?

**CPC:** In her work *Sinners Welcome*, Mary Karr writes about religion in a different kind of subversive way. One particular poem in her collection called "The Wife of Jesus Speaks" made me realize that this subversive subject matter about religion is okay to write about. My father was a Baptist minister, and I was totally immersed in church and religion for my entire adolescence. I've grappled with my religious upbringing and my feelings about it as an adult, but reading her work is when I really started questioning my religious beliefs and how they may be different than those I grew up with.

So when I was given an assignment to write a letter poem to a familiar character, I started thinking about whom and what I knew best, and it had to be a biblical character. Then I thought about Lot's wife and about how what we hear is, "Don't be Lot's wife. Don't turn around. Don't look back," but I think Lot's wife was pretty badass. How would I feel if I was Lot's wife? Mary Magdalene? She didn't get the same respect or notoriety as the twelve disciples, though she was much more faithful to Jesus than many of them. With Bathsheba, the biblical account places all the blame on David. He seduced her and killed her husband, but the Bible eliminates the possibility that she was actually attracted to David or that she wanted to be seduced. Maybe she was on the roof on purpose. I don't know, but to assume that's not possible is a disservice to women.

I don't believe that my interpretations of these women are correct because there's not a correct interpretation. I think that what I know about women in the Bible is through patriarchal lenses. The stories were written by men and were told to me by men. What I do believe is that my interpretation as a woman

is more plausible than the skewed, patriarchal narrative that circulates about these women. My intention with the biblical personae is not to make them “look good” but to make them human.

**KAS:** If you could write a possible poetic voice for any historical figure outside the Bible, who would it be and why?

**CPC:** I have been fighting a poem for almost a year from the perspective but not necessarily in the voice of Anne Boleyn. I guess that I’m drawn to stigmatized women of history, and I like to explore the things we don’t normally consider. Maybe that’s because I know that too often, and we’re all guilty of it, we make assumptions about people and judge them based on superficial and incomplete information. Arbitrary criteria are used to judge Anne and people like her. That happens across the board. It’s cyclical throughout history, and we do it now. It’s very interesting to me to consider someone’s true motives and true feelings about a particular event or a particular person.

**KAS:** What do you hope your readers learn from your poetry about, simply put, “being human”?

**CPC:** I don’t ever feel like I’m writing to teach, if that makes sense. If I did, then I would have to assume that I have some greater knowledge about humanity that others do not. That’s not the case. However, I do hope that I achieve some degree of universality. I hope that there will be something in my poetry that appeals to everyone. Will it make readers cry? Will they remember Sunday school? Will it make them angry? I’m even okay if people get offended. My goal is to appeal to a universal audience that can identify with the psychological complexities in my poetry, which is, simply put, part of being human.

**KAS:** What advice do you have for aspiring writers about writing, publishing, and rejection?

**CPC:** My personal response to rejection is, “It doesn’t matter. It can’t matter.” Publishers are subjective. I think editors make decisions based on their particular style and what they like to read. The degree of subjectivity extends to things like, “Did I have Captain Crunch for breakfast when I wanted cornflakes?” My advice is to send out poems anyway. I recommend submitting to journals with specific tastes similar to your poetic sensibilities. With that said, just because you may make conscious choices about audience does not mean that you’ll always get accepted, and if you don’t, throw the rejection letter in the trash. Move on, because the rejection itself doesn’t matter. If the rejection matters at all, then it should be seen as an opportunity for revision or growth. There’s someone out there who will say yes.

**KAS:** Can we expect to see another collection of your poems in the near future? If so, what are you currently working on?

**CPC:** What's probably going to happen next is the opposite of biblical women: whores. The book that's happening in my head and to some degree on the page is inspired by scholarly research I did for SAMLA about *Birdsong*, and I've become obsessed with this idea of the World War I prostitute. The thing that fascinates me most about the World War I period is the complex relationship between prostitute and soldier. For example, certain brothels were for officers only and some for soldiers only. Mothers were selling their daughters into prostitution. Prostitutes with sexually-transmitted diseases were more valuable than those without. There was a whole complex structure of the way prostitution worked during the war.

I'm writing in voices similar to the biblical persona poems in *Other*. I have also drafted a poem about a World War II prostitute, who is entirely different from the prostitutes of World War I, and I also have a poem in the voice of a geisha. I anticipate that my next volume of poetry will be an entire compilation in one voice of a prostitute, but I'm still working with voices and perspectives.

**KAS:** Best of luck with this project! These are all very interesting ideas, and we need more literature about badly behaved women! Thank you so much for your insights, advice, and honesty, Catherine.

**CPC:** More badly behaved women is something I can likely deliver! Thank you for asking thoughtful, complex, and pertinent questions. It has been my pleasure.



# The Cinnamon Peeler's Wife

(from *Other*)

*Catherine Pritchard Childress*

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After Michael Ondaatje's "The Cinnamon Peeler"

I am the cinnamon  
peeler's wife. Smell me.

Imbued with his seasoned hands,  
my feet scatter a fragrant path  
signaling his journey started here:

stripping silk stockings  
from my thighs, nipping toes,  
his spicy fingers floating

above my arched back,  
perfuming my pillow  
like Solomon's whore  
whose scents coaxed  
a boy to a lover's bed

like this one  
where his palms  
meet my blades,  
seized my shoulders  
with an intoxicating grip,

then with one deft motion,  
took me, held me  
like his kokaththa's handle,  
marked me with a lingering scar.



# Bathsheba's Bath

(from *Other*)

Catherine Pritchard Childress

I was aware of your leering  
when I dropped my robe,  
dipped one foot into the tub,  
eased my calf inch by blistering inch,  
testing the waters to see  
if my friends were right  
about the way you look at me  
when I walk into a room  
with the man who defends your crown.

It was no accident you were there  
that day taking in the view  
from your palace roof  
or that I moved into sight  
just in time to see  
the corners of your mouth  
curl to invitation.  
Response bubbled past my thighs  
as I slipped deeper into the heat.



# Blossoming Indigo

(first published in *Appalachian Heritage*)

*Catherine Pritchard Childress*

---

I coveted the Wranglers my brother wore  
when we played outside—durable denim  
seat impervious to rocks, sticks, glass shards  
unearthed when we scooted toward the stream,  
worn knees grass-dyed lucent chartreuse,  
pockets deep enough to hold his morning finds—  
bumboozers, bottlecaps, buckeyes—treasure  
I had to secure in the dirty hem of my skirt—  
what “ladies” wore to church, to play, to school  
where other girls arrived each September  
in Lees with pleats and pink pinstripes.  
But they’re pink! My rebuttal when my father  
defended his edict with Deuteronomy 22:5,  
declared jeans are for boys, refused  
even my plea to try on one pair, just to see,  
to take on each lean leg like I’d watched  
my friends do, ease them over calves, knees,  
shimmy past thighs, hips, around my waist;  
look over my shoulder; discover curves  
blossoming indigo; a woman in the glass  
reflecting why he always said no.



# At What Cost

*Beth Miller*

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“It’s not a person, it’s a system of power that is always deciding in the name of humanity who deserves to be remembered and who deserves to be forgotten.” – Eduardo Galeano

At nine AM and nine PM, the ceiling of the glass box featured the rising and then the setting of the sun to indicate the coming and going of a day. The rest of the time, it was hardly noticeable as it was never overly harsh or lacking in brilliance, and the white puffy clouds always drifted nobly across its azure surface. The walls of the structure were translucent from the inside, moving pictorially around the world at the behest of whichever city was trending that week, but it was also possible to see the hillside and distant valley surrounding their mountain-top placement as well as the boy’s refinement center on their neighboring hilltop. The residents of the glass box were all females between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, and they felt more that they lived in a glorious, air-conditioned outdoors, than any of the substandard, middle-class families confined within four opaque walls and reliant on air conditioning and heat. Though the real outdoors were hardly inhabitable for young, beautiful, eligible women of their social class, prosperous humanity’s appearance of a connection to nature was very important to maintain. As they were not allowed to venture outside for their own safety, as well as the perpetuation of the perfection of humanity, the vitamin D in the shower water and their organic vegan diets kept their skin glowing and fresh. This innovation had its roots in the folk tales of previous centuries, when witch queens in fairy tales bathed in either milk or the blood of virgins and stayed young and beautiful forever. These stories always ended in a strange twist the women of the box couldn’t quite work out. Almost every time, a bothersome, quirky maiden of questionable breeding came along to leave the kingdom in ruins and claim leadership for herself. Virgin blood and grass-fed milk both being odd options for



modern women, they augmented the lack of sacrifice with a strict regimen of wrinkle creams applied every six hours and natural injections to fill in their skin's weaknesses every three to six months. The women in their late mid-twenties intensified this practice by doubling the rate of cream applications and using injections monthly to achieve a match by the deadline. Other than the slow and abysmal process of aging standing at odds with the battle to maintain their unique, society-determined ideal, each day passed one like the next, and it took a series of extreme circumstances for the women to sense that the earth beneath their pedicured feet was changing and that it was working to integrate them more fully into norms of its other classes.

These changes were first noticed by the girls one particular October when they were taking down their early fall decorations to transition into the more somber tones of a mature autumn and noticed handprints on the walls of the glass box. At first the girls believed they were from a woman with backwards hands, but she surely wouldn't be allowed in the box, and so they had to have come from the world below and outside. Something like this had never happened before in the scrolling electronic history of the box, and so the women were forced to reach out to their security protector for help. He wore a stiff polyester suit and smoothly glided across the inch-and-a-half tall grass placed outside of their home. He was, they were nearly positive, one of several guards who lived in a small square cabin in the middle of their hill, but their guards were intentionally indistinguishable for manufacturing purposes. Each guard was able to patrol one side of their home every seven-and-a-half minutes, and so a full circuit was made every half hour. The path for the guards to walk along was paved in a matte black and kept very smooth so they could elegantly scrape the corners as they turned at sharp right angles at the precise moment prescribed. If the girls had thought to investigate further, they might have discovered that the guards' movements mirrored those of their heroes from previous time periods who patrolled doors and tombs, but they were not encouraged to examine their protectors, only accept their habitual presence.

The girls brought the hand incident to the attention of the box matron, a formerly beautiful woman in her early thirties who was now aged out of use and desire, and she asked one of the guard men to take care of it, which he immediately did. There were tertiary women in the box as well who took care of cleaning and maintenance tasks, but they were not allowed outside the box, either, for fear that they might contaminate the purity of the interior and the education of the girls locked inside, and so a second security guard was obligated to clean the strange handprints off the outer pane while the first continued his patrol. Though the box matron insisted that they forget any unpleasantness ever hap-

pened, the whispered imitations of the squeaking glass could be heard late at night for weeks.

A few weeks later, while adding in plum accents to prepare for late autumn, they noticed a few women sitting outside the box, clad in large drapes and rags which was strange as these particular elements had been out of vogue for years and were impossible to even buy any more with the demolition of all of the junk shops. The younger girls proposed that they were the married women who occasionally passed by, waddling with the weight of the children they carried inside but always smiling, airing themselves away from the gaze of their dedicated husbands and passing by old spaces of familiarity and meditation. Rather than these inspiring images of a possible future, the newcomers' skin was not pale and creamy, but sometimes red or brown, and occasionally yellow, green, and blue. "It would have been difficult for them to adapt to the fashion of the season," the glass box matron remarked. All of the girls nodded in agreement. The women stood outside of the box and stared in, locking eyes with each girl one after the other. Then, when they had everyone's attention, they wiped their eyes in a downward fashion, both women moving in unison. Next, they scraped their necks with their fingernails, leaving long red traces from browned fingertips, and last, they rubbed their palms along their stretched and protruding stomachs. The baggy overclothes they wore made them look like large, injured birds, blaming the angelic children playing beneath the nest for their own broken wings while their children cry for worm scraps in the nest above.

During their self-expression time later that afternoon one of the older girls, Annabelle, sat with her dark, shyly auburn hair curled around behind her ears and traced her hand outlines onto the craft paper in front of her. She shaded each palm a dark red, and began to draw arms reaching back into the depths of the painting, matching her own shoulders, elegant neck, and heart-shaped face as if she were holding out a mirror. For the first time it struck her that she was more familiar with her own appearance than she was with the unique features and particular accessorized arrangements of any of the women sitting around her. All of the white and cream pencils were taken as were the blues and purples for irises and so Annabelle was left with some rich browns, usually reserved for landscapes, and dark greens, used for trees and occasional gowns on designing days. Annabelle shaded backwards from the garnet hands to the shoulders, casting a medium brown along the thin collarbones and the thin bridge of the nose and shading in distinct cheek hollows. The eyes she made a dark green with a yellow spiked ring around the pupil, and she used the same red for the lips as she had for the hands, making them rich and full. The hair she colored as her own but darker, the chocolate brown curls accented along curled ridges

with a burnt copper. She held up her work again in its mirror position, and locked eyes with the woman she had created. The woman in the drawing stared back at Annabelle with the same depth of eyes, containing some unknown form of knowledge that she had briefly glanced when the crones were wandering the hillsides. After a deep cleaning, the officers had brought the awkward, oversized clothing the women had been wearing to the matron at the back door of the glass box. The matron would store these garments for a costume party or allow the younger girls to use them for accent scraps in their first fashion show. In the protected environment of the box, they would last far longer than the ashes of their owners.

When the glass box matron saw Annabelle's drawing, she removed Annabelle from the rest of the girls for three days, and she was not allowed to speak or eat. The seclusion from perfection led Annabelle on a search for some form of companionship, and questions soon flew down and perched alongside her. She searched through all the decorative bookcases, kept in the dim recesses of the glass box, hoping for books on history and culture that might explain why she was in the box and who those women on the outside had been. The girls had been brought up to speak to their own thoughts and feelings as quickly as possible, and daily practiced phrases which would be appropriately employed later in their partnered lives. She became so desperate and so lonely without the ability to self-express as to read the entirety of *Where Does Organic Vegan Cotton Come From?: An Aware and Unbiased History*, the thickest book on the shelves that actually held words augmented by pictures rather than the other way around, but it only covered the past two years of cotton's runway usage, and failed to answer its own questions.

After the three days were up, however, Annabelle continued to look into the mystery of the fingerprints and the oddly cloaked women outside. As Annabelle neglected her studies and refused to contribute her beautifully artistic hands to the creation of the annual fashion show's modern line, the glass box matron had Annabelle punished; an inch of her heels was cut off and she was force-fed extra dessert each night for a month and not allowed to vomit afterwards. The ten extra pounds and only three inches of artificial height made her look preposterously ugly in comparison to the other girls. After the first two days the girls wouldn't sit on either side of her, and after the first week, the boys in the glass box next door never let their eyes linger near her or her vicinity, lest her curiosity and stubborn curiosity prove to be detrimental towards their understanding of the execution of the feminine ideal.

When she hit fifteen pounds over one hundred and ten and broke the special scale she had been given upon her arrival, she asked the glass box matron if

she could speak to one of the men who patrolled about leaving the box. Annabelle and the matron moved into the sunniest side of the box. The matron moved container after container out of her way, sliding them across the antique hardwood floors made from barnwood. She reached her arms out into the wall and pulled down a beautiful interpretation of the sky, and extended her bangled arm out into the bright abyss and snapped twice. The even scraping that had slowly gotten louder stopped, ground into the earth, and stopped again. The matron addressed herself to the pattern-driven men standing outside her domain, "Officer, I need you to arrange an exodus. Here is the girl." He eyed her skeptically and explained that she was in the glass for her protection, as well as the protection of society's beautification. The glass matron scoffed as Annabelle was hardly beautiful now, and by getting rid of one girl she would increase the profit made from the procurement of the others. A decrease in supply meant an increase in demand. The patrolman instructed the two women to wait; he would have everything prepared for them at the start of the new third of the season. The glass box matron quickly shut the window to return the projected sky to its intended position. She glared down at the flesh obscuring the visibility of Annabelle's bodily bone structure and marched back into the more frequent spaces of the glass box. Annabelle had explored all of these areas during her days of interior self-confinement, but the mystery of the exchange between the patrolman and the matron invigorated her to further pursue the origins of the outside women. She would soon learn the truth.

Wine, burnt orange, and mustard were removed from the tapestries, frames, and closets as their gentler, winter white compatriots arrived in color-coordinated gift bags and were injected into the stark whiteness of the glass rooms. The start of winter's arrival for Annabelle meant her upcoming expulsion from the glass box. In her freed interior exile time, she found excerpts from writers that had been used for dress patterns in more recent culture, pages that hypothesized words like "freedom" and "voice." She wasn't sure what these scraps of brilliance meant, but she was hoping to discover these mysteries on her "travel lessons," as the matron had been calling them.

Exactly in the middle of winter, just before the solstice, an extra patrolman left his cottage hut in the middle of the hill and disappeared down below the horizon. Annabelle watched for two anxious hours until he returned again, tugging a heavy, curtained object up the hill. The curtain maintained fall's color scheme, and several of the girls winced at the distaste and gossiped as the servant-applied paint dried on their nails. Annabelle was torn between anxiety and excitement; she knew whatever was concealed was her escort to a new phase in her life. Some of the girls she had been friends with for seven and eight years, in

the quiet night moments when the matron was asleep and everyone's beauty rest cycles had commenced, told her that she was lucky to have an alternative future now, because otherwise she would age out rejected, she had only two years remaining, and she had never been demure enough to pass the graduation exams and wasn't quite pretty enough, though of course she was exceptional, to be selected in spite of her personality with the promise of medication by any reasonable man of family. It was better for her to try to make something of herself now than to attempt matron training or something similar in two years. The patrolman called the matron over, and she draped a silk scarf over Annabelle's eyes and guided her back through the maze of fabrics and jewelry to wherever it was in the box that the exit was concealed. Annabelle had searched for the exit one day after her discovery of the window, but temporary exile, or whatever they had planned, was alarming enough. She didn't want to risk getting into trouble again.

The matron's hands abruptly stopped Annabelle's movement forward and jostled her shoulders slightly for effect. "We will not miss you, Annabelle," she said, and then shoved her forward. Annabelle stumbled into a hard wall as the matron giggled and yanked her hair attempting to remove the silk scarf from around her eyes. The patrolman joined in the mirth of the matron as Annabelle discovered that she was now contained in a separate small, glass container, so small that she could not raise her elbows more than a few inches. If she contorted herself and moved one arm at a time, she could raise her arms to her jaw and bend her head down to reach them. As the full realization of the horror of her exile began to make sense to Annabelle, the matron smirked at her and slammed the door shut. Attempting not to panic, Annabelle examined her surroundings. The glass was thick but clear, and only slightly muffled the sounds of the night; it was not quite the selective soundtrack technology of the communal glass box. The matron tossed a braid over her shoulder in response to Annabelle's hesitant understanding of her condition, and her purple eye shadow blinked into the moonlight; "You would have more space if you were not quite so fat. Enjoy exile. I'll be sending the girls along soon, and then you will be entirely forgotten." She slammed the door to the large glass box and huffed away, back through the recesses of Annabelle's previous home.

"You will adjust to this new containment," the patrolman said. "It's for your own protection. You will come back and thank me later; I assure you." Annabelle stared back at him.

"The box will move as you instruct it." He began to walk away. "Best of luck in your ungrateful explorations," he called over his shoulder, drawn back to the magnetic routine of his post.

After the patrolman had scraped around the corner, Annabelle calmed her breathing. Though it felt ridiculous, she decided to instruct the smaller glass box on what she would like it to do. "Box, move forward." After a brief pause, long enough for her to take a breath, the world tilted sharply and she fell, left shoulder into unforgiving corner, forehead into front panel, as the box condescended to float down the hill. Annabelle wasn't sure if she truly was trapped in the box, and so she pushed on the panels at the angles she could manage and felt around the seams for a window like the matron had found previously but was unsuccessful. She did manage to turn herself enough to see the glass box on top of the hill slipping away. When she reached the patrolmen's hut, which was further away than she had realized, she glanced back again, and all evidence of the life on the hill vanished. She was staring into blurry blank space. Annabelle eventually slid into a slouched position that allowed her a few moments of rest, but the anticipation of the unknown proved too exciting to allow her to sleep.

The box's angle became less severe as dawn approached, and leveled out entirely with the emergence of the sun. Annabelle realized that the dark smoke they had been approaching was not another protective illusion of a prosperous people but instead some strange structural forms that reached high into the air into obscurity and produced a nearly opaque form of steam. The box coasted to a stop, floating just above the surface of the ground, and the dark shapes bustling in and out of the towering buildings began to approach through the smoke. After she had watched them for a while, Annabelle asked the box to continue on its journey. Rather than go around the town, as she had hoped, the box took her through dark side streets where steaming buckets produced dripping balls of wet color and dyed women's thick arms steamed, vibrant colors. The women stared at her darkly as she floated through the town, and Annabelle noticed how much larger they were than the women she was accustomed to. Their muscled legs pushed them backwards and forwards as they stirred the vats, and, as Annabelle was attempting to see further through their shawls to their faces, she became very aware of the creaminess of her skin in juxtaposition to the smoky countenances that surrounded her. She saw two strong women remove one of the colored blobs from their giant bowl and begin to untangle and unfurl it. Annabelle understood – this place made cloths. The box responded to Annabelle's observation and turned onto a main road in the town, following curving streets to the center. There, the box showed her circles upon circles of little girls, humming softly to themselves, and each sewing delicate pieces of clothing. The garments they themselves wore were tattered and poorly crafted, but the older girls were producing lace patterns from scratch on their small machines, the tiniest movements making the most exquisite details. As Annabelle mentally picked out her own favorite pieces, the box sharply adjusted their path again

and took her down an alley into the smokier, darker spaces of the town. As they left the town center filled with circles, a small child looked up from her sewing machine, sharply shorn hair in all directions, and reached out her hands to touch Annabelle. The little girl succeeded only in smudging the bottom portion of the box's glass, but she did not react in pleasure or disappointment.

The smoke in the alleyway was so thick that Annabelle couldn't see to make out her surroundings, but a mechanized noise rapidly increased in volume and made her ears roar. As the smoke cleared, Annabelle saw a moving line of boxes, the perfect size for shoes, and recognized the label for her favorite brand. The box glided along the curving path, rising slightly, and Annabelle could see the next season of the patent leather pumps she was wearing, all unbutchered with their full four inches, rolling by in their various sizes. The box paused again between a large doorway with a line of nervous women standing outside of it. The window framed a table covered in mechanical extremities, but Annabelle couldn't make out what she was looking at. Two obese women in ugly trench coats emerged from the empty side of the table's room, stretching back gloves onto their arms. They disappeared for a moment on the opposite side of the table and returned holding a smaller woman by the arms. They picked up her body and laid her on the table and strapped down her ankles and wrists. The terrified woman looked desperately around her and locked eyes with Annabelle. Her dark green eyes stood out on her soot-covered face. Annabelle pressed her palms into the glass box and gazed forward. The woman's head was placed into a holder and rolled back to an unnatural angle. The two women moved a light to shine directly on the woman's face and the one furthest from Annabelle moved one of the mechanical arms level with the woman's ear. They paused for a moment to discuss something with one another, and then the woman raised the mechanical arms to above her patient's eye. The glint in the morning sun came to a small point, and Annabelle realized she was viewing a needle at the end of the device. She next wished to unsee what she had noticed before as the needle was slowly lowered into the woman's eye. Annabelle screamed as she watched the woman's back curve unnaturally, hips rising off the table, her entire body attempting to remove itself from the torture chamber. The second woman removed the vial from the table's grotesque arm while the first began unstrapping her ankles, arms, and head. Annabelle watched as the vial was inserted into a small paintbrush and the woman picked up a dull shoe and began to paint it with the shiny extraction from the patient's eye. Annabelle cried out and vomited downward onto her identical shoes, understanding how the manufacturer achieved its unique liquid shimmer that had always attracted her to the brand. "Get me far away from here," she begged the glass box. It contentedly ambled along.

It was afternoon by the time Annabelle reached the next city, which shone so brightly that she doubted anyone ever experienced nighttime. The city streets were arranged in squares and, as they entered the city, Annabelle saw that all the surfaces showed mirrored reflections and silver-grey woman ran back and forth with white cloths, polishing each mirror again and again. The women occasionally glanced at Annabelle but did not stop to examine her more closely. She continued to observe them, and noticed that under their eyes was a deep purple, and all of their irises were a bright, electric blue. The box continued to move toward what Annabelle assumed was the center of town, and a small crowd of young girls became ecstatic at her approach. When they emerged into the bright middle of the city, the mirrored reflections blinding Annabelle from all directions, shadow men were led by hand by the small girls from the places of brilliance in long black coats and tall black hats. The men surrounded Annabelle and pulled bright silver knives out of their pockets. The world became shadowed as they simultaneously reached out their arms and excited voices were drowned out in unison by the terrible screech of the knives shaving the glass around her. The little girls stood below the men's arms and held out eager hands to receive these shavings, and would only walk away as the weight of the glass began to cut into their hands and the blood pooled and caused the shards to begin to float away. Annabelle feared for her own safety and reflected on what the patrolman had said as the men's dark eyes fixed up and down her body and they slowly scraped away at her protective cover.

After they had scraped away eight perfect squares from her box, leaving the confining structure but creating windows of access, young boys came out from behind the dark men, dirty in this city of lights, and they pulled strips of cardboard along with them. The men reassembled a box for Annabelle but left with small strips for breath and sight. They took the hand each of a small boy and a small girl, and Annabelle was unsettled by the way the bright eyes and teeth of the men glinted at her as she floated out of the brightness into a desert.

Her skin began to bake through the holes in the cardboard on her trip across the desert. The sun beat down as it set and she grew so cold in the darkness. Her improperly large stomach, probably thirteen points overweight now, began to grumble as she tried to not lean on the cardboard pieces of her box. The whole of the next day the sun beat down on Annabelle, and she cried as blisters on her skin slowly popped and cooled and she turned from cream to toffee to brown. Rain came as trees rose around her at nightfall, and monstrous calls back and forth kept her awake in the darkness. It grew hotter and hotter, a wet heat that made the cardboard gather and wither, and Annabelle stripped back the layers of fabric that coated her darkened skin. Her box was following some sort of



river, and she relaxed in the intensifying heat to the sound of its soothing voice, and fell into a fitful sleep.

Annabelle awoke to a terrible stench and the sound of screams, and tore away a little of her box to see more closely. She looked out to see women stripped bare, whose own excrement leaked slowly from them into the lush ground. The intensity of the stares of these women unsettled Annabelle even more than the men from the city of lights. The box did not stop in this new village, but it continued to turn throughout their journey, forcing Annabelle to make eye contact with each woman before it would allow her to move along.

The thick forest dissipated, and Annabelle noticed that she was approaching some sort of small town. Women were milling about the streets, scantily clad like the women in summer magazines, but in the most beautiful silks and velvets Annabelle had ever seen. Their hips swung seductively as they waltzed through the streets of the town. One by one they tucked flowers into Annabelle's hair and clothing as she glided past and they removed the remaining strips of damp cardboard.

"Stop," a deep voice commanded, and Annabelle saw a man emerging from behind the crowd of women after her garden garment was completed. Her darker skin glowed next to the natural warmth of the flowers, and she knew she looked beautiful. She could see it in his eyes. He fondly tweaked the nipple of the woman standing closest to Annabelle, and somehow signaled all of the women to walk away. The woman glanced back at Annabelle over her shoulder, and Annabelle noticed the dead eyes that had been obscured by beauty before. "We've been waiting for you," he said when all the women had disappeared into the small homes. She looked out at him from thick eyelashes and nodded. He reached down and bent back the glass, stretching the framed squares of her former cage until there was enough space for Annabelle, and she took his hand and stepped out. Annabelle felt the distant stares of the women through slits in the main doors of their homes, right at their eye level, and Annabelle followed the man as he led her through a wooden door with soft light oozing out of the bottom. It closed behind them with a soft thump.

After the brightness of the day outside, it took Annabelle a few moments to adjust her eyes to her new surroundings. Low, swooping notes from a cello in the corner swept about the room, pulling men's faces to hers, as the man placed a large, strong hand across the entirety of her back and slid his other hand into hers. He led her down the stairs to the center of the room, where all of the chairs were turned towards her. The man spun Annabelle around to the beat of the music, and they began to dance to cries of delight came from the tables

surrounding a dance floor. Annabelle was soon surrounded by a circle of men, each staring hungrily after her and her flowered beauty. The cellist was joined by two violins and a bass, and Annabelle knew as she swung her thick, dark hair across the room that nothing more beautiful had ever happened to anyone in the world. She let the man's strong hands support her as she began to spin and writhe, dancing as seductively as she knew how, as all of the women in the box were taught on moving outward expression days. A second man tried to come and dance with Annabelle, angering the first. They rolled across the floor and fought as she was joined by a third. This process continued until Annabelle had no choice but to dance alone, using the poles around the edges of the dance floor as her partners rather than men. She stepped over and around the bodies, lost in the rhythm of the music caught by her swaying hips and stomping feet.

The fighting men were separated and placed into chairs around the circle surrounding the dance floor, and Annabelle, overestimating her spinning skills, swung too enthusiastically and landed in the lap of the first man she had been dancing with, to the delighted whoops of the rest. They locked eyes, and she smiled at him for a moment, but she was confused when he yanked her legs apart and she was straddling his lap, unable to stand up, and he moved his hands up and down her thighs and between her legs. He held her there as his other hand pulled her head to the side, stroking her neck, and his hot lips descended there, sucking on her neck. Annabelle's head swam. A second man knelt in front of the first and ran his hands up and down her torso, over her breasts, and then across her hips. He lifted her off the lap of the first man and pulled her on top of him onto the floor and rolled her beneath him. The man sat back slightly, sitting right below Annabelle's hips, and continued to move her fearful body to the weight of the music. The first man got back up off his chair and again started stroking her neck, moving his hands lower and lower and tossing flowers one at a time into the crowd. The excited yelling grew more and more intense as the flowers were removed from her body. Annabelle gasped as rough tongues grazed her flesh, and the first man, the largest, pulled her by her hair onto a rectangular table that had been brought into the center of the now brightly lit room. A familiar silk scarf wrapped around her mouth and was tied tightly behind her head as the man forced her to bend over the cold metal table. "This is where we teach women to embrace their sexuality," he whispered in her ear, bending down over her. "This is what it costs to be beautiful." Annabelle screamed as he entered her.

Years later, a dark, dirty shape covered in rags clawed to the top of a sunny, grassy hill. The woman pressed her long, snapped fingers against the cool glass and stared back at her reflection, using the glass box as a mirror. Her bloodied

hands left a dark red imprint on the glass, and she locked eyes with her reflection, forest green irises with a yellow crown in the center, tanned skin with light accents along her collarbones and the bridge of her nose. One of the more observant girls inside noticed her, and told herself that she would ask the matron about the strange woman outside. Besides, the girl inside the box thought, she had always wanted to know about the inner workings of the world.



# Deserted

Elizabeth Saulsbury

## Characters

Rose Campbell, an urban housewife in her mid-30s.

Bobby Campbell, a blue collar workman in his mid-30s;

Rose's husband.

Ray, a toddler who lives with the Campbells.

Cora Ripples, a crotchety old woman; the Campbells' upstairs neighbor.

## Setting

A decrepit city apartment building.

## Time

Sometime in the future, close to present day.

## A Play in One Act

### Scene 1

SETTING: The kitchen of a dingy city apartment. The peeling paint, dilapidated furniture, and grimy atmosphere of the room are reflective of the dying world outside its walls. Yet it appears that someone has been doing his or her best to keep the apartment as cheerful as possible; this is indicated in the cheerful pictures on the walls and in the eerie bright spots of color in the room. The kitchen is modestly furnished with the most basic of furniture. The intense heat of the apartment can be sensed by the audience.

AT RISE: ROSE CAMPBELL is on her knees, wringing out a washcloth over a bowl. A few drops of water are just barely wringed out of the cloth and into the bowl, to her evident satisfaction. ROSE is drenched in sweat. Her hair is carelessly tied at the top of her head in an effort to keep cool. After coaxing a few more drops out of the cloth, Rose rises stiffly to her feet and painstakingly places the cloth in the kitchen sink. RAY toddles onstage quietly behind ROSE's back and daringly touches the water in the bowl.

**ROSE** (whirling around with a gasp): Oh Ray! No, no, no, Ray, don't touch the water! (carefully pulls Ray away) There...we mustn't touch the water now, okay?

**RAY**: I'm thirsty.

**ROSE**: Me too, honey, but we gotta save the water, see? When Bobby gets home tonight, I'll let you have a drink then, all right?

**RAY**: Bobby'll take all the water.

**ROSE**: Don't be silly, Ray, of course he won't. Now go play in your room until he comes home.

(RAY gives ROSE a defiant look and lunges for the bowl. ROSE scoops him up and carries him away, howling, to his room offstage. A moment after they have left, BOBBY CAMPBELL enters from the other side of the stage. Like his wife ROSE, he is perspiring and weary. He slams the front door as he trudges in.)

**BOBBY** (shouting): Rose?

**ROSE** (off): Be right there, Bobby!

(RAY stoops down to look at the meager bowl of water on the floor and sighs. He picks it up and tosses it carelessly on the table. ROSE enters and exchanges a quick kiss with BOBBY.)

**ROSE**: Anything?

**BOBBY**: Nope, same as yesterday.

**ROSE** (cautiously): Well there's got to be *something* left out there.

**BOBBY** (sits tiredly down at table): Well, there's not. Me and every other guy in town have been scrounging over the whole city, and there's just nothing left. There's no water, and that's that.

**ROSE**: What's everybody living off of, then? Where's everybody else getting their water from?

**BOBBY**: Same as us. Stealing liquids out of abandoned refrigerators. Wringing water out of clothes somebody forgot in laundromat machines. Little puddles in the gutter. (abruptly slams hands on table in anger and raises voice) In the gutter, Rose! Out of the damn gutter! What the hell happened to us?

**ROSE** (moves to stand behind Bobby and rubs his shoulders comfortingly): Bobby honey, it's o.k., it's o.k. Shhh. It's not gonna last forever; nothing ever does. And when it's over, we'll just—

**BOBBY** (rises from table): You see any signs of this letting up, Rose? 'Cause I sure as hell haven't. This isn't a drought; this is a judgement day. And we can't

run away from it because there's no place else to go. The whole damn world has been getting its day of reckoning for the past six months, and there's no more water, Rose, *it's all gone*. (picks up bowl of water with disgust) Look at this, look what you've come to. Look what all of us have come to. Wringing a few droplets of water into Tupperware and praying to God it lasts...

**ROSE:** Oh, don't worry about me, Bobby, I don't mind doing it—

**BOBBY:** I'm not worried about you, I'm worried about all of us. Everyone's wasting away in the heat and the drought; all of us scrapping away at each other to get what precious water remains. You, me, the kid...where is he, anyway?

**ROSE:** Ray? He's in his room. He was trying to get at the water before you came in just now, and I upset him.

**BOBBY** (sitting back down grumbly): What did I tell you about that kid, Rose?

**ROSE:** Please, don't start that again.

**BOBBY:** Why I let you bring him in here I don't know...

**ROSE:** I couldn't just leave him out there by himself! If you'd seen him deserted out there on the streets—just a baby, all alone—I expect you'd have done the same, anyway.

**BOBBY:** The hell I would have. I know trouble when I see it, and that kid is it. Taken well over half of our water rations, at least.

**ROSE** (indignantly): That's not true and you know it. He's just a baby, Bobby! Now hush, here he comes.

**BOBBY** (aside): Three years old.

(RAY enters, thumb in mouth, and stays close to ROSE, looking mistrustfully at BOBBY.)

**BOBBY:** What do you say, there, Ray?

**RAY:** You're a dirty pig.

(RAY exits serenely, while BOBBY looks after him in shock and ROSE fights back laughter.)

**BOBBY:** Why that little... you think it's funny, huh?

**ROSE** (laughing): Yes, I do. I guess you had it coming, anyway. Now come on and laugh, Bobby, you know it's funny.

(BOBBY hesitates, then chuckles sheepishly.)

**ROSE:** I guess we all need something to laugh about to keep us sane. Want something to eat?

**BOBBY:** No, I'm not hungry. (pulls cigarette out of pocket and starts to smoke while ROSE opens a bag of dried fruit gummies)

**BOBBY:** It was bound to happen eventually, I guess. No species, not even ours, can thrive for as long as we have. Sooner or later, something like this was bound to happen.

**ROSE:** Come on, Bobby, you know how I hate it when you start your doomsday talk.

**BOBBY:** But... but why did it have to be drought? The drought, and the heat? Anything but that; anything would have been better. Flood, plague, war, disaster—anything but drying up like an animal carcass in a wasteland. Anything but drinking your own sweat. Anything but crying up to the sky and realizing that God's burning you...very, very slowly.

## SCENE

### Scene 2

SETTING: Rose and Bobby's bedroom.

AT RISE: ROSE and RAY are kneeling beside the sofa for evening prayers.

**ROSE AND RAY:** I pray the Lord my soul to take, amen.

**ROSE:** And God bless all the people in the world tonight...

**RAY** (echoing dutifully): All the people.

**ROSE:** And may He bless the world with water again...

**RAY** (looking up): I'm thirsty, Rose. Gimme something to drink.

**ROSE:** Not until tomorrow, Ray...remember what I told you, now. Let's finish our prayers.

(BOBBY enters and stands in the bedroom doorway, looking annoyed.)

**ROSE:** And God bless all the other little children in the world who don't have water tonight, and God bless mommy and daddy...

**RAY:** Where are my mommy and daddy?

**ROSE:** Well...Bobby and I are your mommy and daddy, dear.

**RAY:** No you're not.

**ROSE:** Yes we are.

**RAY:** No you're not.

**ROSE** (abruptly harsh): Well we are now.

(RAY is in surprised silence, and ROSE is a little surprised by her own wrath.)

**BOBBY:** C'mon, Rose, let him get some sleep. Go to your room, Ray.

(ROSE reluctantly kisses RAY on the forehead; RAY exits. There is a marked silence; BOBBY sighs and stretches out on the sofa; ROSE sits coldly in a chair with her arms folded across her chest.)

**ROSE:** Don't say it.

**BOBBY:** Oh, I'm gonna say it. I'm gonna keep saying it until you can get it through your head. He's not ours. So stop telling him he is.

**ROSE:** You said yourself that the world is doomed...that humanity will be dead any day now. So what's the harm in it?

**BOBBY:** It's not true.

**ROSE:** It might as well be. We're all he's got, and he...he's all we've got.

**BOBBY** (chuckles): This is really poetic, you know that? You get the kid you've always wanted, but it's right on the edge of the end of the world.

**ROSE** (icily): I think you're cruel.

**BOBBY:** At any rate, don't do that praying with him anymore. You're getting his hopes up, and yours too.

**ROSE:** Hope's all we've got.

**BOBBY** (sits up on sofa): See that's where you're wrong. We've still got brains, and we've got guts, and those are the only real things that are gonna see us through all of this. Hope hasn't done a thing for us so far, has it? It's hurting us, if anything. I don't think it's the thirst and the heat that kills you as much as it is the hoping—the hoping, and the waiting.

**ROSE** (moves to sit next to BOBBY): I don't care. I'm still going to pray with Ray every night. I happen to believe that God can hear us. But I'm sure you think that's stupid...

**BOBBY:** Oh no, not at all. In fact, I'm absolutely convinced that God sees and hears everything we're doing. But where it's comfort to you, it's terrorizing to me. Don't you see? Why hasn't He saved us, sent us water again? My, how I envy



the people who don't believe in Him. They feel this as a natural death, I guess. But it's not. We're not dying. We're being killed.

**ROSE:** Oh, you're talking crazy.

**BOBBY:** Am I? Listen, Rose, you and I both believe that there's somebody up there that's watching over us. You love Him. I hate Him. But nevertheless, we both believe. We believe that someone out there has the power to save us, and He won't. He's deserted us.

(There is a knock on the door. BOBBY and ROSE freeze and look at each other questioningly. BOBBY creeps softly to the kitchen and grabs a rifle from behind a cabinet. Then he carefully opens the door and peeks out, breathing a sigh of relief at what he sees.)

**BOBBY:** Oh, it's just you, Cora. It's all right, Rose, it's Cora.

(CORA enters tottering.)

**CORA** (only half-jokingly): Oh, that's it, then? Am I so old and irrelevant as to merit such a flippant greeting? Hello, my dear. (kisses ROSE hello)

**ROSE:** Sit down, Mrs. Ripples. What can we do for you?

**CORA:** I can't stay, I'm afraid. I've only just come down to ask for Robert's help in my apartment. That little quake last week toppled over one of my bookshelves, right in front of the door to the back bedroom. I'm afraid I can't lift it...

**ROSE:** Certainly, Bobby would be happy to help.

**BOBBY** (begrudging but consenting): Yeah, I'll help you, Cora.

(CORA and BOBBY exit, and ROSE sits back down on sofa. A moment later, RAY enters in his pajamas, rubbing his eyes and sniffing.)

**ROSE:** Oh baby, what's wrong?

**RAY** (climbs into ROSE's lap): I had a bad dream.

**ROSE:** Well you just stay right out here with me until those nasty old dreams go away.

**RAY** (snuggles close): Thank you, Mama.

(ROSE's emotions of surprise and happiness are evident as she fights back sympathetic tears.)

## SCENE

### Scene 3

SETTING: CORA RIPPLES' apartment; it looks very similar to the Campbell apartment, except it is practically in shambles. A bookshelf has fallen in front of the entrance to the back bedroom, which is directly opposite the front door.

AT RISE: CORA and BOBBY enter in the front door.

**CORA:** Here we are, just come in, Robert. See it there? (pointing to the bookshelf)

**BOBBY:** I see it, and I see the rest of the mess in here, too. Haven't you cleaned up any of this from the quake yet?

**CORA:** Well, what with one thing and another...I've been too busy on the hunt for water. I guess I'll have a chance to get to cleaning up now, though.

**BOBBY** (suddenly interested): You mean you actually found some?

**CORA:** Oh, I certainly did. Took these old bones long enough, too. Help me move the bookshelf, and I'll show you.

(BOBBY hoists the splintered bookshelf out of the way of the door.)

**CORA** (fishing through purse): Thank you, dear. Let me get the key out, here... I guess you can understand me keeping the door locked, huh?

**BOBBY:** Well yeah, absolutely. Anybody'd be crazy not to want it. How much have you got in there?

**CORA:** Oh I'd say...about seven barrels.

**BOBBY:** Seven barrels?!

**CORA:** I sort of raided my nephew's office last week—you remember Jeremy? Worked for that lovely big agency down on East Main?—He left the city a while ago and the whole building was empty...so I took all the drums from the water coolers.

**BOBBY:** How come nobody else had thought of that yet?

**CORA:** They had. Most were already gone. But I poked around and found a few more in a closet. Brought 'em here in trips.

**BOBBY** (bitterly): How come you hadn't told us about this sooner?

**CORA** (unlocking door): Well I hadn't had 'em long myself, Robert. And I did want you to know about it. I hate to think of Ray and Rose dying of thirst.

There! Come on in, dear, and I'll show you.

(The ominous atmosphere and BOBBY's determined face bode danger as the two EXIT. A few seconds after later, a screech is heard offstage, then a thud. BOBBY re-enters, dragging CORA's body.)

BOBBY (muttering): Had to be done. Had to be done. But where to put her? What if Rose comes down here for something? (BOBBY is struck with inspiration when he sees an open window.) Fire escape! (drags CORA to the window and dumps her out on the fire escape. Then he paces the apartment, deep in thought.) Those barrels...they'll add years to our survival, to our species. They're the time and the answers we've been looking for; one last push to get us out of this hole. (pauses to look at the drums) But still...three ways, it's not a whole lot of water...it wouldn't last the three of us long at all. How much would this buy us, anyway? A week, tops. Just enough to get Rose's hopes up again. It's hardly worth mentioning to her, really...

## SCENE

### Scene 4

SETTING: Early morning in the Campbell's kitchen, two weeks after BOBBY killed CORA.

AT RISE: ROSE is sitting at the kitchen table in her pajamas, quietly sniffing. Her appearance is frail, haggard, and hopeless. BOBBY enters from the bedroom, clad similarly, but looking much healthier. He gives ROSE a good morning kiss.

**BOBBY:** What are you doing up so early, babe?

**ROSE:** Thought I heard Ray, so I got up... (leans head in hands, on the verge of tears) And then I remembered.

(BOBBY sits down at the table and ROSE moves to sit in his lap.)

**BOBBY:** There wasn't anything you could have done, Rose. You know that? Nothing. Now come on, babe, pull yourself together.

**ROSE:** I could have found more water...I should have looked harder. I should have given him more when he wanted it, only I was afraid we'd run out...I thought I was doing what was best.

**BOBBY:** Rose, even if you could have gone back to all those moments and made them better, Ray still would have died. He wasn't cut out for this world, Rose... (looks away guiltily). And neither are you.

**ROSE:** And when I found him the next morning, the first thing I thought of was what you had said about God hearing us. He heard Ray's baby voice screaming for water, the same way He heard me screaming when I found him. You must have been right. He must have deserted us. Oh, Bobby! (rises to look out the window, where the sun is streaming in) There's nothing I wouldn't do to make the world well again. I'd pick it up in my own fingers and stitch it back together...I'd flood it with rain for seven years, if I could. I'd do anything to make everything the way it was, or at least to help you and Ray. But I don't know how. (BOBBY shifts uncomfortably) A week without water. Nothing, not even a drop. God sees me; He sees me right now at this window, Bobby. (turns tearfully away from window) Why doesn't He help me?

**BOBBY:** Why don't you go lie down for a while, honey? You haven't gotten much sleep since...well, in a long time.

**ROSE:** I've tried. Every time I lie down, my throat starts to close and my tongue feels like sandpaper and my head pounds over and over and over again. I can't sleep. Anyway, I'm afraid of what might happen if I do. But thank you, Bobby. You've been so patient with me these past few days. It isn't easy on you either, I know, but you don't complain.

(BOBBY stands in shamed silence)

**ROSE** (with resolution): At any rate, we'll face whatever comes together, won't we?

**BOBBY** (weakly): That we will.

**ROSE:** It's just the two of us against the world, Bobby, literally. Ever since Ray... and ever since you found Mrs. Ripples in her apartment.

**BOBBY:** Yes.

**ROSE:** We may very well be the only two people left in the entire city, Bobby. We're all we've got.

(ROSE is swaying a little. BOBBY rises and helps her lie down.)

**ROSE** (out of breath and weak): Oh Bobby...you may have to fix the world without me.

**BOBBY** (hastily kneeling next to her): Rose, listen for a minute, will you? I need you to listen to me. I love you, Rose, do you know that? I love you. But I need you to know that everything I've done...everything I'm doing...I did what I thought best, all right?

**ROSE** (lovingly): Of course, Bobby, I know that.

**BOBBY**: It's tough to do the things I've done; I've made hard choices. But I believe that they were the *right* choices. And at the end of the day...well, it's about survival, right?

**ROSE**: You've done all you can to help us survive. It just wasn't enough, I guess. You know, I'm not really mad at God.

**BOBBY**: You're not?

**ROSE**: No. I'm too tired to be. And besides...He could have changed everything if we wanted to. He could have given us water if he thought we should have it...if He thought it wasn't our time to leave. I'm so, so tired, Bobby.

(BOBBY grasps ROSE's hand.)

**ROSE**: He can see me right now, I know. He could make me live longer. But He doesn't want me to. He doesn't want me to be with you anymore. He wants me somewhere else. I love you, Bobby...

(ROSE dies; BOBBY sits in stunned silence for a moment, then slowly backs away from ROSE's body.)

**BOBBY** (muttering): There's nothing else I could have done. Nothing. It was the hard truth of everything we've been through; of this desperate age, this end of an era. We were all going to die soon anyway, Ray, Rose, and me...it makes the most sense to let one person live as long as they can. And that person should be *me*! Rose and Ray wouldn't have survived long in this kind of a world anyway, water or no water. It's too broken, too distant, and too lonely. The kind of world that they were born for doesn't exist anymore...it dried up months ago. And the water upstairs would have been wasted on three people who would have died anyway. One person should have it...the person who has the best chance of making it out of this mess alive! Rose will understand that! (glances uncomfortably at ROSE) Rose...*would* have understood that.

(BOBBY sits down on the edge of the kitchen table with a sigh.)

**BOBBY** (sadly): Rose...her sacrifice was the ultimate one. And someday, somewhere, when some civilization remarks on the long-dead history of ours, maybe they'll speak of Rose and her courageous sacrifice. How she died so that others might live. Ah Rose! I wish there could have been another way.

(A low rumble of thunder is heard; BOBBY sits bolt-upright and looks around suspiciously, as if some unseen person is playing a trick.)

**BOBBY:** Who's there?

(A bright flash of lightening is seen through the window; BOBBY rises as if in slow-motion and goes to the window. A faint patter of rain begins to fall.)

**BOBBY:** Oh...my...

(A tremendous boom of thunder interrupts before he can continue; the rain-storm begins in full force. BOBBY turns from the window in manic fright and catches sight of ROSE. The full gravity of what he has done suddenly dawns on him, and he loses control. He crumbles to his hands and knees, pounding his fist on the floor in rage, his cries echoing through the apartment.)

**(BLACKOUT)**

**(THE END)**



# Four Seasons

Joshua Cole

## Spring

<sup>1</sup> Forests tempted by birds singing,  
Blossoming pear trees sway

<sup>2</sup> in a breeze, flowers spring  
from a weary winter.

## Summer

<sup>3</sup> Under a Sophora tree  
I compose nature's beauty.

<sup>4</sup> My mind wonders up at the moon  
I reflect summer in Chang'an.

## Autumn

<sup>5</sup> Amber reflections in the sky  
relax upon a peach grove.

<sup>6</sup> Under the harvest moon,  
crops slumber behind mist.

## Winter

<sup>7</sup> White crystals blanket the ground,  
Sounds are absent among the plain.

<sup>8</sup> Crackling wood fills the room,  
The windowpane weeps from pressure.



# Scraps of a Life

*Nancy Jane Earnest*

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In his workshop,  
wood founders mid-project  
from intention denied.

Birdhouses for building,  
aromatic cedar traced, ready  
for saw standing mute,

fragrant wood waiting for shapes  
of chests, toys—stacked on  
hand-hewn workbench,

abandoned like scraps  
of pioneer dresses, bound for a new life  
in quilts to warm a different way.

Dismantled stacks of life unfinished,  
dreams undone,  
destined for completion elsewhere  
according to another's plans.





## Juxtaposition

Gabe Cameron

“Home is where one starts from.”

T. S. Eliot, “East Coker”

It's funny how you remember things a lot bigger than they actually were. I can still recall the way I felt walking through my old elementary school after it had been adapted into a vocational building for some of my high school's classes. At sixteen, the hallways were so much smaller, ceilings within arm's reach. Unbeknownst to me, I had become a giant, and I hated seeing things so differently. That same insecure feeling washed over me as I stood on the gravel driveway of what used to be my grandmother's house. Other than the tremendous shift in size, the house seemed the same. The tattered off-white sidings looked untouched, while the green shutters from childhood photos and memories faced outwardly toward me, as if they were welcoming me back from a long trip.

When I was a child, I felt more comfortable at my grandmother's house than anywhere else in the world. I began treating the place like it was my own habitat, where I was allowed to shed my skin and forget all the pressures of being a ten-year-old boy. The fields and woods that connected the house to civilized life were mine to explore, and I was comfortable being a regular *Indiana Jones*.

“Do you mind if I take a minute? I know that it's been a while, but I haven't been here since...” I trailed off, like eight years wasn't long enough for me to talk about her death. “I just feel like maybe I would like to go in alone.”

“Don't worry about it. You can take all the time you need,” Ashley said. “The book is on a desk in the computer room.” Ashley and her sister had moved into the house after both my grandparents had passed. I was probably half my age the last time we had spoken.

I had avoided the house for so long, it was almost strange to even imagine being in the front yard again. After my grandmother got sick, I stopped coming here. I couldn't bring myself to disassociate her sickness from her home. I had only ever seen the house as a place of happiness and warmth, yet after she was gone, it felt solemn and empty. I hated the feeling of her being gone from my life, and it felt most prevalent when I was here. When I was forced to come along to help pack up some of her things, I spent as little time as possible in the house. Whenever I was inside, it felt like a lead blanket was being lowered on me slowly, and if I stayed, I would eventually suffocate.

The house was quiet when I came in through the faded, white door. Uncomfortably quiet, really. I spent every single Sunday of my life inside these walls from the moment I was born to the time she got sick. Out of all the memories I had made here, I couldn't remember a time where I was alone. Now the silence reeked of death.

Once I stepped into the kitchen, the only thing I could notice was that they hadn't replaced the terrible wallpaper that my grandmother and grandfather had insisted on keeping. It was an awful shade of brown, with little unflattering flowers that were scattered in inconsistent patterns. My grandparents were the type of people that held onto anything, despite its worth. When my grandmother died, we discovered that she had been a closeted hoarder who had kept everything over the course of a half century. I suddenly imagined us on a terrible TV show on TLC, where my mother would sift through pounds of receipts and old paperwork, while my dad would tell the camera that it was just "so surprising."

As I stood at the end of the kitchen, I could smell her. Well, I could smell her cigarettes. My grandmother was one of the heaviest smokers I have ever known, and it was one of the reasons for her death. Cigarette smell is something that doesn't come out when everything has been coated with it for decades. The smell made me uncomfortable, like she was here sitting next to me. I turned towards her spot at the dinner table, thinking that I wouldn't know what to say if I saw her again.

I wandered through a living room that I had no recollection of. The shape of the room was the same, but everything else had been redone. New furniture was tossed in different locations, faces in photos had changed, and the carpet had been replaced. I felt as though I didn't even know where I was. They had changed so much about the house, that it seemed unfamiliar. I knew I shouldn't be offended. I mean, it's their house now. Yet, I couldn't fight wishing to see it like it once was just one more time before leaving all of this behind me.

When I went into what they had turned from a storage room to an office, I saw what Ashley had told my father about. Hours beforehand, I had received a call from my mother, asking if I could drive to the old house to pick something up. I asked if dad was coming with me, but I could tell by her silence that he still had trouble with this sort of thing. It's almost like we had forgotten that the house even existed, and here was this strange woman calling us years later telling us that it was time to remember.

I grabbed the book without looking inside of it. I didn't think I could take so many emotions at once. I put it into my backpack and went to the bathroom to wash my face. I still couldn't get over how different everything looked on the inside. I was starting to miss the security of the kitchen wallpaper. It might be terrible, but at least it was something terrible I could *remember*.

The constant smell of cigarettes was starting to make me feel sick. I got the feeling I was being watched again, like there was no escaping my grandmother's ghost. It felt like I was thirteen, and the lead blanket was getting closer and closer to covering me completely. Maybe eight years wasn't enough. How long would I have to wait before I could forget?

"Thank you for finding it, Ashley," I said as the door closed behind me. I could breathe freely again.

"It's no problem. When Gina and I were moving the dresser, it just fell out from behind it. I guess it had been sitting on top or something. Either way, I'm glad you guys have it now," she smiled, and I forced myself to smile back. "Would you like some coffee or something? We've got some leftover cheesecake."

"Thanks, but I better get back. Really, though. Thank you for calling us," I said. I was wondering when the lump in my throat would subside.

Ashley and I exchanged goodbyes, and I waved as I started my car. She waved back and went inside, most likely never to be seen by me again. I sat in silence for a moment, until it felt like I was free from the lingering emotions the house had given me. I opened up my bag and took out the photo album. I flipped through countless decades of memories. Some with my uncles, my younger cousins, grandparents, and even family friends. I didn't see much of my dad's side of the family anymore, so it was nice to see pictures of a time when we were happy to be with one another. My grandmother was the glue that held the family together. When everything happened, it was like we all decided to lead separate lives.

Eventually, I reached a page with only one picture. It was my cousins and I dressed in what looked like desert gear. My grandparents were right behind us,

holding canteens and wearing safari hats. I couldn't have been more than seven or eight. Under the picture, there were little sticky-notes written in distressed cursive. I could tell it was her handwriting. It was the same shaken script she had used when she insisted to write thank you notes from the hospital. The sticky notes went on for pages. She had written something personal for different members of my family and, while flipping through them, my eyes were drawn to the first thing she had written for me:

Remember our past, but focus on your future.

The words replayed over and over in her voice. She knew she wasn't going to make it, and must have left this for someone to find in her things from the hospital. She was always optimistic that she would get better, so I had assumed that she had been caught off guard by her death after she got sick, but now I wasn't so sure.

I closed the book, afraid that I'd smudge her handwriting. The feeling of being watched crept back into my stomach. I wondered what she would think, seeing me now in comparison to when I was a child. So many years had gone by, but I still had trouble even thinking about her. It's hard to imagine whether she would be proud or upset. In a way, I knew she would hate seeing me like this. All she ever wanted me to do was move on, and here I was having trouble even seeing her house again.

I wiped the tears from my eyes and backed up to turn out of the driveway, catching one last glimpse of the house. It almost felt like I was young again, and I would just be back next week. The house disappeared behind the hill as I pulled farther away. I would always feel a sense of longing and nostalgia for it, but she was right. It was time for the house to stop haunting me.

When I stopped at the end of the driveway, I pushed the book back into my backpack. I turned into the street and headed home. I never looked back.



# The Interruption

Laura Traister

That morning, too, sleep clawed  
your eyes and obligation picked  
at your mind as you drove  
through the weak light toward  
the daily stupid labor of living.

Stalling by the rusted stop sign,  
you checked the rearview mirror  
and saw her: a sparrow, slender,  
riding the wings of morning, silhouetted  
against the burnished golden sky.

When the light shifted, you noticed  
her delicate beak and paper feathers bowed  
down by a hunk of bread, and recognizing  
her humble tenacity, you pressed  
the pedal and resolved to journey with her.



# Beach Seining

Laura Traister

You probably haven't fished like this unless  
you have lived near the ocean, but they say  
that experience is the best teacher, so first,  
you'll grab one of the poles and allow the net  
to hang vertically as you wade into the sea.  
Corks float along the top length, weights  
anchor the bottom of the net to the sandy floor.  
Your partner will hold the other pole.  
It's impossible to catch anything alone.  
You have to walk, but the waves work for you.  
When the weight of the catch nears capacity,  
your partner calls in. Glide toward each other,  
slowly, to close the net, and move toward shore.  
Carelessness now will cost you everything.  
Sift through the kaleidoscope of tiny creatures,  
laid out like stones across a jeweler's worktable.  
Emerald algae and amber Sargasso weed  
teeming with shrimp, crabs, snails, fingerlings.  
Place them in a bucket of saltwater while you look.  
Then return to the sea and feel the current reclaim  
its treasures, sweeping them to oblivion, or perhaps  
some ancient city, and beckoning you to come too.



# Circumventing the Street Preacher

Laura Traister

He looks at me as I pass  
across the mass of students  
crowding around the din.

Wearing a whitewashed collar,  
claiming to have conquered sin,  
his words clatter like stones

in the hollow of my soul.  
I linger; lost questions rise,  
old cravings as I realize—

I break the gaze  
stiff as stale bread  
and bitter wine.

I keep walking,  
hungry for hope,  
thirsty for grace.



# Indian Morning

Laura Traister

The first day  
at the guesthouse, I rise early.  
From the rooftop  
I see dry brown hills,  
residents of Jaipur striding  
through the neighborhood.

Myna birds chatter  
with monkeys  
in a language  
I can't understand.

Footsteps slap the stairs,  
and my host appears.  
Embarrassed,  
I mumble  
a greeting and ask  
if I'm allowed up here.



*Of course, he answers. It is your home.*

He plucks a blossom from a young crape jasmine,  
settles it in my palm,  
and leaves to oversee breakfast.

During a rickshaw ride, I realize  
I left the gift.  
I know the monsoon  
blew the bloom away,  
but I still scramble to the roof  
when we return, crouching  
on the dank tile.

Months later, thumbing  
through photos alone,  
I am still searching.



## Judges' Biographies

### *Jane Hicks – Poetry*

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A native of upper East Tennessee, Jane Hicks is an award-winning poet, teacher, and quilter. Her poetry appears in both journals and numerous anthologies, including *Southern Poetry Anthology: Contemporary Appalachia* and *Southern Poetry Anthology: Tennessee*. Her first book, *Blood and Bone Remember*, was nominated for and won several awards. Her “literary quilts” illustrate the works of playwright Jo Carson and novelists Sharyn McCrumb and Silas House; one became the cover of her own book. The art quilts have toured with these respective authors and were the subject of a feature in *Blue Ridge Country Magazine* in an issue devoted to arts in the region. The University Press of Kentucky published her latest poetry book, *Driving with the Dead*, in the fall of 2014. *Driving with the Dead* was named Poetry Book of the Year by the Appalachian Writers Association.

### *William Kelley Woolfitt – Fiction*

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William Woolfitt is the author of the poetry collections *Beauty Strip* (Texas Review Press, 2014) and *Charles of the Desert* (Paraclete Press, forthcoming). His fiction chapbook *The Boy with Fire in His Mouth* (2014) won the Epiphany Editions contest. His poems and stories have appeared in *Blackbird*, *Image*, *Tin House*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Epoch*, and other journals. He is the recipient of the Howard Nemerov Scholarship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference and the Denny C. Plattner Award from *Appalachian Heritage*.

### *Meredith McCarroll – Non-Fiction*

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Born and raised in the mountains of Western North Carolina, Meredith McCarroll studied English at Appalachian State University. She earned her PhD from University of Tennessee, and is currently

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***Randall Wilhelm – Drama***

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